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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2361.

THE STORY OF DOROTHY GRAPE, ETC.

BY

JOHNNY LUDLOW (MRS. HENRY WOOD).

IN ONE VOLUME.

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THE STORY

OF

DOROTHY GRAPE

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

JOHNNY LUDLOW

(MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE").

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"God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."

LONGFELLOW.

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THE

STORY OF DOROTHY GRAPE.

DISAPPEARANCE.

ACCORDING to Mrs. Todhetley's belief, some people are born to be unlucky. Not only individuals, but whole families. "I have noticed it times and again, Johnny, in going through life," she has said to me: "ill-luck in some way lies upon them, and upon all they do; they *cannot* prosper, from their cradle to their grave." That there will be some compensating happiness for these people hereafter—for they do exist—is a belief we all like to cherish.

I am now going to tell of people in rather humble life whom this ill-luck seemed to attend. *That* might never have brought the family into notice, ups and downs being so common in the world: but two mysterious disappearances occurred in it, which caused them to be talked of; and those occurrences I must relate before coming to Dorothy's proper history. They took place before my time; in fact when Squire Todhetley was a young man, and it is from him that I repeat it.

At this end of the village of Islip, going into it from Crabb, there stood on the right hand side of the

road a superior cottage residence, with lovely yellow roses intertwining themselves about its porch. Robert Grape and his wife lived in it, and were well enough to do. He was in the "post-horse duty," the Squire said—whatever that might mean; and she had money on her own account. The cottage was hers absolutely, and nearly one hundred pounds a year income. The latter, however, was only an annuity and would die with her.

There were two children living: Dorothy, softened by her friends into Dolly; and Thomas. Two others, who came between them, went off in what Mrs. Grape used to call a "galloping consumption." Dolly's cheeks were bright and her eyes were blue, and her soft brown hair fell back in curls from her dimpled face. All the young men about, including the Squire, admired the little girl; more than their mothers did, who said she was growing up vain and light-headed. Perhaps she might be; but she was a modest, well-behaved little maiden. She went to school by day, as did her brother.

Mr. Grape's occupation, connected with the "post-horse duty," appeared to consist of driving about the country in a gig. The length of these journeys varied, but he would generally be absent about three weeks. Then he would come home for a short interval, and go off again. He was a well-conducted man and respected.

One Monday morning in summer, when the sun was shining on the yellow roses and the dew glittered on the grass, Robert Grape was about to start on one of these journeys. Passing out to his gig, which waited at the gate, after kissing his wife and daughter, he stopped to pluck a rose. Dolly followed him out. She was sixteen now and had left school.

"Take care your old horse does not fall this time, father," said she, gaily and lightly.

"I'll take care, lass, if I can," he answered.

"The truth is, Robert, you want a new horse," said Mrs. Grape, speaking from the open door.

"I know I do, Mary Ann. Old Jack's no longer to be trusted."

"Shall you be at Bridgenorth to-morrow?"

"No; on Wednesday evening. Good-bye once more. You may expect me home at the time I've said." And, with those last words he got into his gig and drove away.

From that day, from that hour, Robert Grape was never more seen by his family. Neither did they hear from him: but he did not, as a rule, write to them when on his journeys. They said to one another what delightful weather he was having this time, and the days passed pleasantly until the Saturday of his expected return.

But he did not come. Mrs. Grape had prepared a favourite dinner of his for the Sunday, lamb and peas,

and a lemon cheese-cake. They had to take it without him. Three or four more days passed and still they saw nothing of him. Mrs. Grape was not at all uneasy.

"I think, children, he must have been mistaken in a week," she said to Dolly and Tom. "It must be next Saturday that he meant. I shall expect him then."

He did not come. The Saturday came, but he did not. And the following week Mrs. Grape wrote a letter to the inn at Bridgenorth, where he was in the habit of putting-up, asking when he had left it, and for what town.

Startling tidings came back in answer. Mr. Grape had quitted the place nearly four weeks ago, leaving his horse and gig at the inn. He had not yet returned for them. Mrs. Grape could not make it out; she went off to Worcester to take the stage coach for Bridgenorth, and there made enquiries. The following was the substance of what she learned:—

On Wednesday evening, the next day but one after leaving his home, Mr. Grape approached Bridgenorth. Upon entering the town, the horse started and fell: his master was thrown out of the gig, but not hurt; the shafts were broken and the horse lamed. "A pretty kettle of fish, this is," cried Mr. Grape in his good-humoured way to the ostler, when the damaged cavalcade reached the inn: "I shall have to take a week's

holiday now, I suppose." The man's answer was to the effect that the old horse was no longer of much good; Mr. Grape nodded assent, and remarked that he must be upon the look-out for another.

In the morning, he quitted the inn on foot, leaving the horse to the care of the veterinary surgeon, who said it would be four or five days before he would be fit to travel, and the gig to have its shafts repaired. Mr. Grape observed to the landlord that he should use the opportunity to go on a little expedition which otherwise he could not have found time for, and should be back before the horse was well. But he never had come back. This was recounted to Mrs. Grape.

"He did not give any clue as to where he was going," added the landlord; "he started away with nothing but his umbrella and what he might have put in his pockets, saying he should walk the first stage of his journey. His portmanteau is up in his bed-room now."

All this sounded very curious to Mrs. Grape. It was unlike her open, out-speaking husband. She enquired whether it was likely that he had been injured in the fall from the gig and be lying ill somewhere.

The landlord shook his head in dissent. "He said he was not hurt a bit," replied he, "and he did not seem to be. He ate a good supper that night and made a famous breakfast in the morning."

An idea flashed across Mrs. Grape's mind as she listened. "I think he must have gone off for a ramble amidst the Welsh mountains," spoke she. "He was there once when a boy, and often said how much he should like to go there again. In fact he said he should go when he could spare the time."

"May be so," assented the landlord. "Them Welsh mountains be pleasant to look upon; but if a mist comes on, or one meets with an awkward pass, or anything of that—well, ma'am, let's hope we shall see him back yet."

After bringing all the enquiries to an end that she was able to make, Mrs. Grape went home in miserable uncertainty. She did not give up hope; she thought he must be lying ill amongst the mountains in Wales, perhaps had caught a fever and lost his senses. As the days and the weeks passed on, there set in a sort of nervous expectancy. Tidings of him might come to her any day, living or dead. A sudden knock at the door made her jump; if the postman by some rare chance paid them a visit—for letters were not written in those days by the bushel—it set her trembling. More than once she had hastily risen in the middle of the night, believing she heard a voice calling to her outside the cottage. But tidings of Robert Grape never came.

That was disappearance the first.

In the spring of the following year Mrs. Grape sold

her pretty homestead and removed to Worcester. Circumstances had changed. Beyond what little means had been, or could be, saved, the children would have nothing to help them on in the world. Tom, thirteen years old now, must have a twelvemonth's good schooling before being placed at some business. Dolly must learn a trade by which to get her living. In past times, young people who were not specially educated for it, or were of humble birth, did not dream of making themselves into governesses.

"You had better go to the mantua-making, Dolly," said Mrs. Grape. "It's nice genteel work."

Dolly drew a wry face. "I should not make much hand at that, mother."

"But what else is there? You wouldn't like the stay-making——"

"Oh dear, no."

"Or to serve in a pastry-cook's shop, or that. I should not like to see you in a shop, myself; you are too—too giddy," added Mrs. Grape, pulling herself up from saying too pretty. "I think it must be the mantua-making, Dolly: you'll make a good enough hand at it, once you've learnt it. Why not?"

II.

The house rented by Mrs. Grape at Worcester was near the London road. It was semi-detached, and built, like its fellow, in rather a peculiar way, as though the architect found himself cramped for space in width but had plenty of it in depth. It was close to the road, about a yard only of garden ground lying between. The front door opened into the sitting-room; not a very uncommon case then with houses of its class. It was a fair-sized room, light and pretty, the window being beside the door. Another door, opposite the window, led to the rest of the house: a small back parlour, a kitchen, three rooms above stairs, with a yard and strip of garden at the back. It was a comfortable house, at a small rent; and, once Mrs. Grape had disposed her tasty furniture about it to advantage, she tried to feel at home and to put aside her longing to be back under the old roof at Islip.

In the adjoining house dwelt two Quaker ladies named Deavor, an aunt and niece, the latter a year or two older than Dolly. They showed themselves very friendly to the new comers, as did their respectable old servant-maid, and the two families became intimate neighbours.

Dolly, seventeen now, was placed with Miss Pedley, one of the first dressmakers in the city, as out-door apprentice. She was bound to her for three years, and went to and fro daily. Tom was day-scholar at a gentleman's school in the neighbourhood.

One Saturday evening in summer, when they had been about three months in their new abode, Mrs. Grape was sitting at the table in the front room, making up a smart cap for herself. She never put on mourning for her husband, always cherishing the delusive hope that he would some day return. Tom sat by her, doing his lessons; Dolly was near the open window, nursing a grey kitten. Tom looked as hot as the evening, as he turned over the books before him with a puzzled face. He was a good-looking boy, with soft brown eyes, and a complexion as brilliant as his sister's.

"I say, mother," cried he, "I don't think this Latin will be of much good to me. I shan't make any hand at it."

"You will be like me then, Tom, for I'm sure I shall never make much of a hand at dressmaking," spoke up Dolly. "Miss Pedley sees it too."

"Be quiet, Dolly; don't talk nonsense," said Mrs. Grape. "Let Tom finish his tasks."

Thus reprimanded, silence ensued again. It grew dusk; candles were lighted and the window was shut down, as the breeze whiffled the flames; but the bright

moon-light still streamed in. Presently Dolly left the room to give the kitten its supper of milk. Suddenly, Tom shut up his books with a bang.

"Finished, Tom?"

"Yes, mother."

He was putting them away when a knock came to the front door. Tom opened it.

"Halloa, Bill!" said he.

"Halloa, Tom!" responded a boy's voice. "I say, Tom, I've come up to ask if you'll go fishing with me to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Tom in surprise. Why, to-morrow's Sunday!"

"Bother! I mean Monday. I'm going up to the Weir at Powick: there's first-rate fishing there. Will you come, Tom Grape?"

Mrs. Grape wondered who the boy was; she knew the voices of some of Tom's school-fellows, but did not recognise this one. Tom, standing on the low step outside, had partly drawn-to the door behind him, and she could not see out; but she heard every word as plainly as though the speakers had been in the room.

"I should like to go, but I'm sure I could never get leave from school," said Tom. "Why, the mid-summer examination comes on the end of next week; our masters just do keep us to it!"

"Stingy old misers! You might take French leave, Tom."

"Mother would never let me do that," returned Tom; and he probably made a sign to indicate that his mother was within hearing, as both voices dropped to a lower key; but Mrs. Grape still heard distinctly. "Are you going to take French leave yourself, Bill?" added young Grape. "How else shall you manage to get off?"

"Oh, Monday will be holiday with us; it's a Saint's Day. Look here, Tom Grape; you may as well come. Fishing, up at Powick, is rare fun; and I've got some prime bait."

"I can't," pleaded Tom: "no good thinking about it. You must get one of your own fellows instead."

"Suppose I must. Well, good night."

"Good night, Bill."

"I touched you last," added the strange voice. There was a shriek of laughter, the door banged back, Tom's hand came in to snatch up his cap, which lay on a table near, and he went flying after the other boy.

They had entered upon the fascinating game of "Titch-touch-last." Mrs. Grape got up, laid her finished cap upon the table, shook the odds and ends of threads from her black gown, and began to put her needles and cotton in the little work-box. While she was doing this, Dolly came in from the kitchen. She looked round the room.

"Why, where's Tom, mother?"

"Some boy called to speak to him, and they are

running about the road at Titch-touch-last. The cap looks nice, does it not, Dolly?"

"Oh, very," assented Dolly. It was one she had netted for her mother; and its border was spread out in the shape of a fan—the fashion then—and trimmed with yellow gauze ribbon.

The voices of the boys were still heard, but at a distance. Dolly went to the door, and looked out.

"Yes, there the two are," she cried. "What boy is it, mother?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Grape. "I did not see him, or recognise his voice. Tom called him 'Bill.'"

She went also to the door as she spoke, and stood by her daughter on the low broad step. The voices were fainter now, for the lads, in their play, were drawing further off and nearer to the town. Mrs. Grape could see them dodging around each other, now on this side the road, now on that. It was a remarkably light night, the moon, in the unclouded sky, almost dazzlingly bright.

"They'll make themselves very hot," she remarked, as she and Dolly withdrew indoors. "What silly things boys are!"

Carrying her cap upstairs, Mrs. Grape then attended to two or three household matters. Half an hour had elapsed when she returned to the parlour. Tom had not come in. "How very thoughtless of him!" she cried: "he must know it is his bed time."

But neither she nor Dolly felt any uneasiness until the clock struck ten. A shade of it crept over Mrs. Grape then. What could have become of the boy?

Standing once more upon the door-step, they gazed up and down the road. A few stragglers were passing up from the town: more people would be abroad on a Saturday night than on any other.

"How dost thee this evening, friend Grape?" called out Rachel Deavor, now sitting with her niece at their open parlour window in the moonlight. Mrs. Grape turned to them, and told of Tom's delinquency. Elizabeth Deavor, a merry girl, came out laughing, and linked her arm within Dolly's.

"He has run away from thee to take a moonlight ramble," she said jestingly. "Thee had been treating him to a scolding, may be."

"No, I had not," replied Dolly. "I have such a pretty grey kitten, Elizabeth. One of the girls at Miss Pedley's gave it to me."

They stood on, talking in the warm summer night, Mrs. Grape at the window with the elder Quakeress, Dolly at the gate, with the younger, and the time went on. The retiring hour of the two ladies had long passed, but they did not like to leave Mrs. Grape to her uncertainty: she was growing more anxious with every minute. At length the clocks struck half past eleven, and Mrs. Grape, to the general surprise, burst into tears.

"Nay, nay now, do not give way," said Rachel Deavor kindly. "Doubtless he has but gone to the other lad's home, and is letting the time pass unthinkingly. Boys will be boys."

"That unaccountable disappearance of my husband makes me more nervous than I should otherwise be," spoke Mrs. Grape in apology. "It is just a year ago. Am I going to have a second edition of that, in the person of my son?"

"Hush thee now, thee art fanciful; thee should not anticipate evil. It is a pity but thee had recognized the boy who came for thy son; some of us might go to the lad's house."

"I wish I had," sighed Mrs. Grape. "I meant to ask Tom who it was when he came in. Tom called him 'Bill'; that is all I know."

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Dolly, who was now standing outside the gate with Elizabeth Deavor. "He is rushing round the corner, at full speed, mother."

"Won't I punish him!" cried Mrs. Grape, in her relieved feelings: and she too went to the gate.

Dolly's hopeful eagerness had misled her. It was not Tom. But it was one of Tom's schoolfellows, young Thorn, whom they all knew. He halted to explain that he had been to a boys' party in the Bath Road, and expected to "catch it" at home for staying so late. Dolly interrupted him to speak of Tom.

"What an odd thing!" cried the lad. "Oh, he'll come home presently, safe enough. Which of our fellows are named Bill, you ask, Miss Grape? Let's see? There's Bill Stroud; and Bill Hardwick—that is, William——"

"It was neither Stroud nor Hardwick; I should have known the voices of both," interrupted Mrs. Grape. "This lad cannot, I think, be in your school at all, Thorn: he said his school was to have holiday on Monday because it would be a Saint's Day."

"Holiday, because it was a Saint's Day!" echoed Thorn. "Oh then, he must have been one of the college boys. No other school goes in for holidays on the Saints' Days but that. The boys have to attend service at college, morning and afternoon, so it's not a complete holiday: they can get it easily, though, by asking leave."

"I don't think Tom knows any of the college boys," debated Dolly.

"Yes, he does; our school knows some of them," replied Thorn. "Good night: I can't stay. He is sure to turn up presently."

But Tom Grape did not turn up. At midnight his mother put on her bonnet and shawl and started out to look for him in the now deserted streets of the town. Now and again she would enquire of some late wayfarer whether he had met a boy that night, or perhaps two boys, and described Tom's appearance;

but she could learn nothing. The most feasible idea she could call up, and the most hopeful, was that Tom had really gone home with the other lad and that something must have happened to keep him there; perhaps an accident. Dolly felt sure it must be so. Elizabeth Deavor, running in at breakfast time next morning to ask for news, laughingly said Tom deserved to be shaken.

But when the morning hours passed and did not bring the truant or any tidings of him, this hope died away. The first thing to be done was to find out who the other boy was, and to question him. Perhaps he had also disappeared!

Getting from young Thorn the address of those of the college boys—three—who, as he chanced to know, bore the christian name of William, Mrs. Grape went to make enquiries at their houses. She could learn nothing. Each of the three boys disclaimed all knowledge of the affair; their friends corroborating their assertion that they had not been out on the Saturday night. Four more of the King's scholars were named William, they told her; two of them boarding in the house of the head master, the Reverend Allen Wheeler.

To this gentleman's residence, in the College Green, Mrs. Grape next proceeded. It was then evening. The head master listened courteously to her tale, and became, in his awakened interest, as anxious

as she was to find the right boy. Mrs. Grape said she should not know him, but should know his voice. Not one of the three boys, already seen, possessed the voice she had heard.

The two boarders were called into the room, as a mere matter of form; for the master was able to state positively that they were in bed at the hour in question. Neither of them had the voice of the boy who had called for Tom. It was a very clear voice, Mrs. Grape said; she should recognise it instantly.

"Let me see," said the master, going over mentally the list of the forty King's scholars: "how many more of you boys are named William, beyond those this lady has seen?"

The boys considered, and said there were two others; William Smith and William Singleton; both called familiarly "Bill" in the school. Each of these boys had a clear, pleasant voice, the master observed; but neither of them had applied for leave for Monday, nor had he heard of any projected fishing expedition to Powick.

To the house of the Singletons next went Mrs. Grape: but the boy's voice there did not answer to the one she had heard. The Smith family she could not see; they had gone out for the evening: and she dragged herself home, utterly beaten down both in body and spirit.

Another night of anxiety was passed, and then

Mrs. Grape returned to Mr. Smith's and saw "Bill." But Bill was hoarse as a raven; it was not at all the clear voice she had heard; though he looked desperately frightened at being questioned.

So there it was. Tom Grape was lost. Lost! and no clue remained as to the why and wherefore. He must have gone after his father, said the sympathising townspeople, all agape with wonder; and a superstitious feeling crept over Mrs. Grape.

But ere the week was quite over, news came to the desolate home: not of Tom himself; not of the manner of his disappearance; only of the night it happened. On the Friday evening Mrs. Grape and Dolly were sitting together, when a big boy of sixteen appeared at their door, Master Fred Smith, lugging in his brother Bill.

"He is come to confess, ma'am," said the elder. "He blurted it all out to me just now, too miserable to keep it in any longer, and I've brought him off to you."

"Oh tell me, tell me where he is!" implored Mrs. Grape from her fevered lips; as she rose and clasped the boy, Bill, by his arm.

"I don't know where he is," answered the boy in trembling earnestness. "I can't think where; I wish I could. I know no more than the dead."

"For what have you come here then?"

"To confess that it was I who was with him. You

didn't know my voice on the Monday because I had such a cold," continued he, laying hold of a chair-back to steady his shaking hands. "I must have caught it playing with Tom that night; we got so hot, both of us. When I heard he had never been home since, couldn't be found anywhere, I felt frightened to death and didn't like to say it was me who had been with him."

"Where did you leave him? Where did you miss him?" questioned the mother, her heart sinking with despair.

"We kept on playing at titch-touch-last; neither of us would give in, each wanted to have the last touch; and we got down past the Bath Road, and on up Sidbury near to the canal bridge. Tom gave me a touch; it was the last; and he rushed through the Commandery gates. I was getting tired then, and a thought came to me that instead of going after him I'd play him a trick and make off home; and I did so, tearing over the bridge as hard as I could tear. And that's all the truth," concluded the boy, bursting into tears, "and I never saw Tom again, and have no more to tell though the head master hoists me for it to-morrow."

"It is just what he said to me, Mrs. Grape," put in the brother quietly, "and I am sure it is the truth."

"Through the Commandery gates," repeated Mrs.

Grape, pressing her aching brow. "And you did not see him come out again?"

"No, ma'am, I made off as hard as I could go. While he was rushing down there—I heard his boots clattering on the flags—I rushed over the bridge homewards."

The boy had told all he knew. Now that the confession was made, he would be too glad to add more had he been able. It left the mystery just as it was before; no better and no worse. There was no outlet to the Commandery, except these iron gates, and nothing within it that could have swallowed up Tom. It was a cul-de-sac, and he must have come out again by these self-same gates. Whither had he then gone?

It was proved that he did come out. When Mr. Bill Smith's confession was made public, an assistant to a doctor in the town remembered to have seen Tom Grape, whom he knew by sight, as he was passing the Commandery about that same time to visit a patient in Wyld's Lane. Tom came flying out of the gates, laughing, and looking up and down the street. "Where are you, Bill?" he called out. The young doctor, whose name was Seton, looked back at Tom, as he went on his way.

But the young man added something more, which nobody else had thought to speak of, and which

afforded a small loop-hole of conjecture as to what poor Tom's fate might have been. Just about that hour a small barge on the canal, after passing under Sidbury bridge, came in contact with another barge. Very little damage was done, but there was a great deal of shouting and confusion. As Mr. Seton walked over the bridge, not a second before he saw Tom, he heard the noise and saw people making for the spot. Had Tom Grape made for it? He could easily have reached it. And if so, had he, amidst the general pushing and confusion on the canal bank, fallen into the canal? It was hardly to be thought any accident of this kind could happen to him *unseen;* though it might be just possible, for the scene for some minutes was one of tumult; but nothing transpired to confirm it. The missing lad did not reappear, either dead or alive.

And so poor Tom Grape had passed out of life mysteriously as his father had done. Many months elapsed before his mother gave up her search for him; she was always thinking he would come home again, always hoping it. The loss affected her more than her husband's had, for Tom vanished under her very eye, so to say; all the terror of it was palpably enacted before her, all the suspense had to be borne and lived through; whereas the other loss took place at a distance and she only grew to realize it by degrees; which of course softened the blow. And

the time went on by years, but nothing was seen of Tom Grape.

That was disappearance the second.

Dolly left her place of business at the end of the three years for which she had been apprenticed, and set up for herself; a brass plate on her mother's door —"Miss Grape, Mantua-maker"—proclaiming the fact to the world. She was only twenty then, with as sweet a face, the Squire says, as Worcester, renowned though it is for its pretty faces, ever saw. She had never in her heart taken kindly to her business, so would not be likely to set the world on fire with her skill; but she had tried to do her best and would continue to do it. A job began to come in now and then; a gown to be turned or a spencer to be made, though not so many of them as Dolly hoped for: but, as her mother said, Rome was not built in a day.

III.

"Mother, I think I shall go to college this morning."

So spoke Dolly at the breakfast table one Sunday in July. The sun was shining in at the open window, the birds were singing.

"It's my belief, Dolly, you would go off to college every Sunday of your life, given your way," said Mrs. Grape.

Dolly laughed. "And so I would, mother."

For the beautiful cathedral service had charms for Dolly. Islip church was a very primitive church, the good old clergyman was toothless, the singing of the two psalms was led off by the clerk in a cracked bass voice; there was no organ. Accustomed to nothing better than this, the first time Dolly found herself at the cathedral, after their removal to Worcester, and the magnificent services burst upon her astonished senses, she thought she must have ascended to some celestial sphere. The grand edifice, the musical chanting of the prayers by the minor canons, the singing of the numerous choir, men and boys in their white surplices, the deep tones of the swelling organ, the array of white-robed prebendaries, the dignified and

venerable bishop—Cornwall—in his wig and lawn sleeves, the state, the ceremony of the whole, and the glittering colours of the famed east window in the distance; all this laid hold of Dolly's senses for ever. She and her mother attended St. Martin's church generally, but Dolly would now and again lure her mother to the cathedral. Latterly Mrs. Grape had been ailing and did not go anywhere.

"If you could but go to college to-day, mother!" went on Dolly.

"Why?"

"Mr. Benson preaches. I met Miss Stafford yesterday afternoon and she told me Mr. Benson had come into residence. The *Herald* said so too."

"Then you must go betimes if you would secure a seat," remarked Mrs. Grape. "And mind you don't get your new muslin skirt torn."

So Dolly put on her new muslin, and her bonnet, and started.

When the Reverend Christopher Benson, Master of the Temple, became one of the prebendaries of Worcester, his fame as a preacher flew to all parts of the town. You should hear the Squire's account of the crush in getting into the cathedral on the Sundays that he was in residence: four Sundays in the year; or five, as the case might be; all told. Members of other churches, dissenters of different sects, Quakers, Roman Catholics, and non-worshippers anywhere at

other times, scrupled not to run to hear Mr. Benson. For reading like unto his, or preaching like unto his, had rarely been heard in that cathedral or in any other. Though it might be only the Gospel that fell to his share in the communion service, the crowd listened, enraptured, to his sweet, melodious tones. The college doors were besieged before the hour for opening them; it was like going into a theatre.

Dolly, on this day, made one in the crowd at the cloister entrance; she was pushed here and pulled there; and although she ran well with the rest as soon as the doors were unlocked, every seat was taken when she reached the chancel. She found a standing place opposite the pulpit, near King John's tomb, and felt very hot in the crush.

"Is it always like this, here?"

The whispered words came from a voice at her side. Dolly turned, and saw a tall, fine-looking, well-dressed man about thirty, with a green silk umbrella in his hand.

"No," she whispered back again. "Only for four or five Sundays, at this time of year, when Mr. Benson preaches."

"Indeed," said the stranger. "His preaching ought to be something extraordinary to attract such a crowd as this."

"And so it is," breathed Dolly. "And his reading —oh, you never heard any reading like it."

"Very eloquent, I suppose?"

"I don't know whether it may be called eloquence," debated Dolly, remembering that a chance preacher she once heard, who thumped the cushions with his hands and shook the air with his voice, was said to be eloquent. "Mr. Benson is the quietest preacher and reader I ever listened to."

The stranger seemed to be a kind man. During the stir made by the clergy, preceded by the six black-robed, bowing bedesmen, going up to the communion table, he found a morsel of room on a bench corner, and secured it for Dolly. She thanked him gratefully.

Mr. Benson's sermon came to an end, the bishop gave the blessing from his throne, and the crowd poured out. Dolly, by way of a change, made her exit from the great North entrance. The brightness of the day had changed; a sharp shower was falling.

"Oh my goodness! My new muslin will be wet through!" thought Dolly. "This parasol's of no use."

"Will you allow me to offer you my umbrella—or permit me to hold it over you?" spoke the stranger, who must have followed her out. And Dolly hesitated and flushed, and did not know whether she ought to say yes or no.

He held the umbrella over Dolly, letting his own coat get wet. The shower ceased presently; but he

walked on by her side to her mother's door, and then departed with a bow fit for an emperor.

"What a polite man he is!" thought Dolly. "Quite a gentleman." And she mentioned the occurrence to her mother; who seemed to-day more poorly than usual.

They sat at the open window in the afternoon, and Dolly read aloud the evening psalms. It was the fifth day of the month. As Dolly finished the last verse and closed the book, Mrs. Grape, after a moment's silence, repeated the words:—

"*The Lord shall give strength unto his people: the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.*"

"What a beautiful promise that is, Dolly!" she said in a hushed tone. "Peace! Ah, my dear, nobody can know what that word means until they have been sorely tried. Peace everlasting!"

Mrs. Grape leaned back in her chair, gazing upwards. The sky was of a deep blue; a brilliant cloud of gold-colour, of a peculiar shape, was moving slowly across it just over head.

"One could almost fancy it to be God's golden throne in the brighter land," she murmured. "My child, do you know, the thought comes across me at times that it may not be long before I am there. And I am getting to long for it."

"Don't say that, mother," cried the startled girl.

"Well, well, dear, I don't want to frighten you. It is all as God pleases."

"I shall send to ask Mr. Nash to come to see you to-morrow, mother. Do you feel worse?"

Mrs. Grape slightly shook her head. Presently she spoke.

"Is it not almost tea-time, Dolly? — whoever is that?"

A gentleman, passing, with a red rose in his button-hole and silk umbrella in his hand, was taking off his hat to Dolly. Dolly's face turned red as the rose as she returned the bow, and whispered to her mother that it was the polite stranger. He halted to express a hope that the young lady had not taken cold from the morning shower.

He turned out to be a Mr. Mapping, a traveller in the wine trade for some London house. But, when he was stating this to Mrs. Grape during the first visit paid her (for he contrived to make good his entrance to the house), he added in a careless, off-hand manner, that he was thankful to say he had good private means and was not dependent upon his occupation. He lingered on in Worcester, and became intimate with the Grapes.

Events thickened. Before the next month, August, came in, Mrs. Grape died. Dolly was stunned; but she would have felt the blow even more keenly than she did feel it had she not fallen over head and ears

in love with Alick Mapping. About three hundred pounds, all her mother's savings, came to Dolly; except for that, and the furniture, she was unprovided for.

"You cannot live upon that: what's a poor three hundred pounds?" spoke Mr. Mapping a day or two after the funeral, his tone full of tender compassion.

"How rich he must be himself!" thought poor Dolly.

"You will have to let me take care of you, child."

"Oh dear!" murmured Dolly.

"We had better be married without delay. Once you are my wife——"

"Please don't go on!" interposed Dolly in a burst of sobs. "My dear mother is hardly buried."

"But what are you to do?" he gently asked. "You will not like to live here alone—and you have no income to live here upon. Your business is worth nothing as yet; it would not keep you in gloves. If I speak of these things prematurely, Dolly, it is for your sake."

Dolly sobbed. The future looked rather desolate.

"You have promised to be my wife, Dolly: remember that."

"Oh, please don't talk of it yet awhile!" sobbed Dolly.

"Leave you here alone I will not; you are not old enough to take care of yourself; you must have a protector. I will take you with me to London, where you

will have a good home and be happy in it as a cricket: but you must know, Dolly, that I cannot do that until we are married. All sensible people must say that you will be quite justified under the circumstances."

Mr. Alick Mapping had a wily tongue, and Dolly was persuaded to listen. The marriage was fixed for the first week in September, and the banns were put up at St. Martin's Church; which, as everybody knows, stands in the corn market. Until then, Mr. Mapping returned to London; to make, as he told Dolly, preparations for his bride. An acquaintance of Mrs. Grape's, who had been staying with Dolly since the death, would remain with her to the last. As soon as Dolly was gone, the furniture would be sold by Mr. Stretch, the auctioneer, and the proceeds transmitted to Dolly in London. Mrs. Grape had given all she possessed to Dolly, in the fixed and firm belief that her son was really no more.

But all this was not to go on to practice without a warning from their neighbour, the Quaker lady; she sent for Dolly, being confined to her own chamber by illness.

"Thee should not be in this haste, Dorothy," she began. "It is not altogether seemly, child, and it may not be well for thee hereafter. Thee are too young to marry; thee should wait a year or two——"

"But I am not able to wait," pleaded poor Dolly,

with tears in her eyes. "How could I continue to live alone in the house—all by myself?"

"Nay, but thee need not have done that. Some one of discreet age would have been glad to come and share expenses with thee. I might have helped thee to a suitable person myself: a cousin of mine, an agreeable and kindly woman, would like to live up this way. But the chief objection that I see to this hasty union, Dorothy," continued Miss Deavor, "is that thee knows next to nothing about the young man."

Dolly opened her eyes in surprise. "Why I know him quite well, dear Miss Rachel. He has told me all about himself."

"That I grant thee. Elizabeth informs me that thee has had a good account from himself as to his means and respectability. But thee has not verified it."

"Verified it!" repeated Dolly.

"Thee has not taken steps to ascertain that the account he gives is true. How does thee know it to be so?"

Dolly's face flushed. "As if he would deceive me! You do not know him, Miss Deavor."

"Nay, child, I wish not to cast undeserved aspersion on him. But thee should ask for proof that what he tells thee is correct. Before thee ties thyself to him for life, Dorothy, thee will do well to get some friend to make inquiries in London. It is my best

advice to thee, child; and it is what Mary Ann Grape, thy mother, would have done before giving thee to him."

Dolly thanked Miss Deavor and went away with a sob. The advice was well meant, of course; she felt that; but quite needless. Suspect Alick Mapping of deceit! Dolly would rather have suspected herself. And she did nothing.

The morning of the wedding-day arrived in due course. Dolly was attiring herself for the ceremony in a pretty new grey gown, her straw bonnet trimmed with white satin lying on the bed (to resume her black on the morrow), when Elizabeth Deavor came in.

"I have something to say to thee, Dolly," she began, in a grave tone. "I hardly knew whether to speak to thee or not, feeling not altogether sure of the thing myself, so I asked Aunt Rachel, and she thinks thee ought to be told."

"What is it?" cried Dolly.

"I think I saw thy brother Tom last night."

The words gave Dolly a curious shock. She fell back in a chair.

"I will relate it to thee," said Elizabeth. "Last evening I was at Aunt Rachel's window above stairs, when I saw a boy in dark clothes standing on the pavement outside, just opposite thy gate. It was a bright night, as thee knows. He had his arms folded and stood quite still, gazing at this house. The moon-

light shone on his face and I thought how much it was like poor lost Tom's. He still stood on; so I went down stairs and stepped to our gate, to ask whether he was in want of anyone: and then, Dolly, I felt queerer than I ever felt in my life, for I saw that it was Tom. At least, I thought so."

"Did he speak?" gasped Dolly.

"He neither spoke nor answered me: he turned off, and went quickly down the road. I think it was Tom; I do indeed."

"What am I to do?" cried Dolly. "Oh, if I could but find him!"

"There's nothing to do, that we can see," answered the young Quakeress. "I have talked it over with Aunt Rachel. It would appear as though he did not care to show himself: else, if it were truly thy brother, why did he not come in? I will look out for him every night and speak to him if he appears again. I promise thee that, Dolly."

"Why do you say 'appears,' Elizabeth?" cried the girl, catching at the word. "You think it was himself, do you not; not his—his spirit?"

"Truly, I can but conclude it was himself."

Dolly, in a state of bewilderment, what with one thing and another, was married to Alick Mapping in St. Martin's Church, by its white-haired rector, Digby Smith. A yellow post-chaise waited at the church gates and carried them to Tewkesbury. The following

day they went on by coach to Gloucester, where Mr. Mapping intended to stay a few days before proceeding to London.

They took up their quarters at a comfortable country inn on the outskirts of the town. On the second day after their arrival, Dolly, about to take a country walk with her husband, ran downstairs from putting her bonnet on, and could not see him. The barmaid told her he had gone into the town to post a letter, and asked Dolly to step into the bar-parlour to wait.

It was a room chiefly used by commercial travellers. Dolly's attention was caught by something over the mantel-piece. In a small glass-case, locked, there was the portrait of a man cleverly done in pencil; by its side hung a plain silver watch with a seal and key attached to a short black ribbon: and over all was a visiting card, inscribed in ink, "Mr. Gardner." Dolly looked at this and turned sick and faint: it was her father's likeness, her father's watch, seal, and ribbon. Of an excitable nature, she burst into tears, and the barmaid ran in. There and then, the mystery so long hanging about Robert Grape's fate was cleared up, so far as it ever would be in this world.

He had left Bridgenorth, as may be remembered, on the Thursday morning. Towards the evening of the following day, Friday, as Dolly now heard, he

appeared at this very inn. This same barmaid, an obliging, neat, and modest-mannered young woman, presenting a rare contrast to the barmaids of the present day, saw him come in. His face had a peculiar, gray shade upon it, which attracted her notice, and she asked him if he felt ill. He answered that he felt pretty well then, but supposed he must have had a fainting fit when walking into the town, for to his surprise he found himself on the grass by the road-side, waking up from a sort of stupor. He engaged a bed-room for the night, and she thought he said—but she had never been quite sure—that he had come to look out for a horse at the horse fair to be held in Gloucester the next day. He took no supper, "not feeling up to it," he said, but drank a glass of weak brandy-and-water, and ate a biscuit with it, before going up to bed. The next morning he was found dead; had apparently died quietly in his sleep. An inquest was held, and the medical men testified that he had died of heart disease. Poor Dolly, listening to this, wondered whether the pitch out of the gig at Bridgenorth had fatally injured him.

"We supposed him to be a Mr. Gardner," continued the barmaid, "as that card"—pointing to it—"was found in his pocket-book. But we had no clue as to who he was or whence he came. His stockings were marked with a 'G' in red cotton; and there was a

little loose money in his pocket and a bank note in his pocket-book, just enough to pay the expenses of the funeral."

"But that likeness," said Dolly. "How did you come by it? Who took it?"

"Ah, ma'am, it was a curious thing, that—but such things do not happen by chance. An idle young man of the town used to frequent our inn; he was clever at drawing, and would take off a likeness of anybody near him with a few strokes of a pen or pencil in a minute or two, quite surreptitious like and for his own amusement. Wonderful likenesses they were. He was in the bar-parlour, this very room, ma'am, while the stranger was drinking his brandy-and-water, and he dashed off this likeness."

"It is *exactly* like," said poor Dolly. "But his name was Grape, not Gardner. It must have been the card of some acquaintance."

"When nobody came forward to identify the stranger, the landlord got the sketch given up to him," continued the young woman. "He put it in this case with the watch and seal and card, and hung it where you see, hoping that sometime or other it might be recognised."

"But did you not let it be known abroad that he had died?" sighed Dolly.

"Why, of course we did; and put an advertisement

in the Gloucester papers to ask if any Mr. Gardner was missing from his friends. Perhaps the name, not being his, served to mislead people. That's how it was, ma'am."

So that the one disappearance, that of Robert Grape, was now set at rest.

MANY YEARS LATER.

I.

We found her out through Mr. Brandon's nephew, Roger Bevere, a medical student, who gave his people trouble, and one day got his arm and head broken. Mr. Brandon and the Squire were staying in London at the Tavistock Hotel. I, Johnny Ludlow, was also in London, visiting Miss Deveen. News of the accident was brought to Mr. Brandon; the young man had been carried into No. 60, Gibraltar Terrace, Islington district, and a doctor named Pitt was attending him.

We went to see him at once. A narrow, quiet street, as I recollected well, this Gibraltar Terrace, the dwellings it contained facing each other, thirty in a row. No. 60 proved to be the same house to which we had gone once before, when enquiring about the illness of Francis Radcliffe, and Pitt was the same doctor. It was the same landlady also; I knew her as soon as she opened the door; a slender, faded woman, long past middle life, with a pink flush on her thin cheeks, and something of the lady about her.

"What an odd thing, Johnny!" whispered the

Squire, recognising the landlady as well as the house. "Mapping, I remember her name was."

Mr. Brandon went upstairs to his nephew. We were shown by her into the small parlour, which looked as faded as it had looked on our last visit, years before: as faded as she was. While relating to us how young Bevere's accident occurred, she had to run away at a call from upstairs.

"Looks uncommonly care-worn, doesn't she, Johnny!" remarked the Squire. "Seems a nice sort of person, though."

"Yes, sir. I like her. Does it strike you that her voice has a home-ring in it? I think she must be from Worcestershire."

"A home-ring—Worcestershire!" retorted he. "It wouldn't be you, Johnny, if you did not get up some fancy or other.—Here she comes!—You are not from Worcestershire, are you, ma'am?" cried the Squire, going to the root of the question at once, in his haste to convict my fancy of its sins.

"Yes, I am, sir," she replied; and I saw the pink flush on her cheeks deepen to crimson. "I knew you, sir, when I was a young girl, many years ago. Though I should not have recognised you when you were last here, but that you left your card. We lived at Islip, sir; at that pretty cottage with the yellow roses round the porch. You must remember Dolly Grape."

"But you are not Dolly Grape!" returned the Squire, pushing up his spectacles.

"Yes, sir, I was Dolly Grape. Your mother knew us well, sir; so did you."

"Goodness bless my heart!" softly cried the Squire, gazing at her as if the news were too much for him. And then, starting up impulsively, he grasped her hand and gave it a hearty shake. A sob seemed to take her throat. The Squire sat back again, and went on staring at her.

"My father disappeared mysteriously on one of his journeys; you may remember us by that, sir."

"To be sure I remember it—Robert Grape!" assented the Squire. "Had to do with the post-horse duty. Got as far as Bridgenorth, and was never heard of more. And it is really you—Dolly Grape! And you are living here—letting lodgings! I'm afraid the world has not been overkind to you."

She shook her head; tears were running down her faded cheeks.

"No, it has not, sir," she answered, as she wiped them away with her handkerchief. "I have had nothing but ups and downs in life since leaving Worcester: sad misfortunes: sometimes, I think, more than my share. Perhaps you heard that I married, sir—one Mr. Mapping?"

The Squire nodded slightly. He was too busy gazing at her to pay attention to much else.

"I am looking at you to see if I can trace the old features of the old days," he said, "and I do now; they grow upon my memory; though you were but a slip of a girl when I used to see you. I wonder I did not recognise you at first."

"And I wonder that you can even recognise me now, sir," she returned: "trouble and grief have so much altered me. I am getting old, too."

"Have you lived in this house long?"

"Nearly ten years, sir. I live by letting my rooms."

The Squire's voice took a tone of compassion.

"It can't be much of a living, once the rent and taxes are paid."

Mrs. Mapping's mild blue eyes, that seemed to the Squire to be of a lighter tinge than of yore, wore a passing sadness. Anybody able to read it correctly might have seen she had her struggles.

"Are you a widow?"

"I—call myself one, sir," she replied, with hesitation.

"*Call* yourself one!" retorted the Squire, for he liked people to be straightforward in their speech. "My good woman, you are a widow, or you are not."

"I pass for one, sir."

"Now, what on earth do you mean?" demanded he. "Is your husband—Mapping—not dead?"

"He was not dead when I last heard of him, sir; that's a long while ago. But he is not my husband."

"Not your husband!" echoed the Squire, pushing up his spectacles again. "Have you and he quarrelled and parted?"

Any countenance more pitifully sad than Mrs. Mapping's was at that moment, I'd not wish to see. She stood smoothing down her black silk apron (which had a slit in it) with trembling fingers.

"My history is a very painful one," she said at last in a low voice. "I will tell it if you wish; but not this morning. I should like to tell it you, sir. It is some time since I saw a home-face, and I have often pictured to myself some kind friendly face of those old happy days looking at me while I told it. Different days from these."

"These cannot be much to boast of," repeated the Squire. "It must be a precarious sort of living."

"Of course it fluctuates," she said. "Sometimes my rooms are full, at other times empty. One has to put the one against the other and strive to tide over the hard days. Mr. Pitt is very good to me in recommending the rooms to medical students; he is a good-natured man."

"Oh, indeed! Listen to that, Johnny! Pitt good-natured! Rather a loose man, though, I fancy, ma'am."

"What, Mr. Pitt? Sir, I don't think so. He has a surgery close by, and gets a good bit of practice. He——"

The rest was interrupted by Mr. Pitt himself; he

came to say we might go up to Mr. Brandon in the sick room. We had reason to think ill enough of Pitt in regard to the Radcliffe business; but the Squire could not tackle him about the past off-hand, this not being just the time or place for it. Later, when he did so, it was found that we had been misjudging the man. Pitt had not joined Stephen Radcliffe in any conspiracy; and the false letter, telling of Frank's death at Dr. Dale's, had not been written by him. So we saw that it must have been concocted by Stephen himself.

"Any way, if I did write such a letter, I retained no consciousness of it afterwards," added Pitt, with candour. "I am sorry to say, Mr. Todhetley, that I gave way to drink at that time, and I know I was often not myself. But I do not think it likely that I wrote it; and as to joining Mr. Radcliffe in any conspiracy against his brother, why I would not do such a thing, drunk or sober, and I never knew it had been done."

"You have had the sense to pull up," cried the Squire, in reference to what Pitt had admitted.

"Yes," answered Pitt, in a voice hardly above a whisper. "And I never think of what I might have become by this time, but for the pulling up, but I thank God."

These allusions, however, may perhaps only puzzle the reader. And it is not with Mr. Pitt, his virtues or

his failings, that this paper concerns itself, but with the history of Dorothy Grape.

We must take it up from the time Dorothy arrived in London with her husband, Alick Mapping, after their marriage at Worcester, as already told of. The sum of three hundred pounds, owned by Dolly, passed into Mr. Mapping's possession on the wedding-day, for she never suggested such a thing as that it should be settled on herself. The proceeds, arising from the sale of the furniture, were also transmitted to him later by the auctioneer. Thus he had become the proprietor of Dolly, and of all her worldly goods. After that, he and she faded out of Worcestershire memory, and from the sight of Worcestershire people —except for one brief meeting, to be mentioned presently.

The home in London, to which her husband conveyed her, and of which he had boasted, Dolly found to be lodgings. Lodgings recently engaged by him, a sitting-room and bed-room, in the Blackfriars Road. They were over a shop, kept by one Mrs. Turk, who was their landlady. "I would not fix upon a house, dear, without you," he said; and Dolly thanked him gratefully. All he did was right to her.

She was, as he had told her she would be, happy as a cricket, though bewildered with the noisy bustle of the great town, and hardly daring to venture alone into its busy streets, more crowded than was Worcester

Cathedral on the Sundays Mr. Benson preached. The curious elucidation at Gloucester of what her father's fate had been was a relief to her mind, rather than the contrary, once she had got over its sadness; though the still more curious doubt about her brother Tom, whispered to her by Elizabeth Deavor on her wedding morning, was rarely absent from her thoughts. But Dolly was young, Dolly was in love, and Dolly was intensely happy. Her husband took her to the theatres, to Vauxhall, and to other places of amusement; and Dolly began to think life was going to be a happy valley into which care would never penetrate.

This happy state of things changed. Mr. Mapping took to be a great deal away from home, sometimes for weeks together. He laid the fault upon his business; travellers in the wine trade had to go all over England, he said. Dolly was not unreasonable and accepted the explanation cheerfully.

But something else happened now and then that was less satisfactory. Mr. Mapping would appear at home in a condition that frightened Dolly: as if he had made the mistake of tasting the wine samples himself, instead of carrying them to his customers. Never having been brought into contact with anything of the kind in her own home, she regarded it with terror and dismay.

Then another phase of discomfort set in: the money seemed to grow short. Dolly could not get

from her husband what was needed for their moderate expenses; which were next to nothing when he was away from home. She cried a little one day when she wanted some badly and he told her he had none to give her. Upon which Mr. Mapping turned cross. There was no need of tears, he said: it would all come right if she did not bother. Dolly, in her secret heart, hoped he would not have to break in upon what he called their "nest egg," that three hundred pounds in the bank. A nest egg which, as he had more than once assured her, it was his intention to keep intact.

Only in one thing had Mr. Mapping been arbitrary: he would not allow her to hold any communication with Worcester. When they first came to London, he forbade Dolly to write to any of her former friends, or to give them her address. "You have no relatives there," he said, "only a few acquaintances, and I would prefer, Dolly, that you dropped them altogether." Of course she obeyed him: though it prevented her writing to ask Elizabeth Deavor whether she had again seen Tom.

Things, despite Mr. Mapping's assurances, did not come right. As the spring advanced, his absences became more marked and the money less plentiful. Dolly shed many tears. She knew not what to do; for, as the old song says, not e'en love can live on flowers. It was a very favourite song of Dolly's, and

her tuneful voice might often be heard trilling it through from beginning to end as she sat at work.

"Young Love lived once in a humble shed,
Where roses breathing
And woodbines wreathing
Around the lattice their tendrils spread,
As wild and as sweet as the life he led.

"The garden flourished, for young Hope nourished,
And Joy stood by to count the hours:
But lips, though blooming, must still be fed,
And not e'en Love can live on flowers.

"Alas, that Poverty's evil eye
Should e'er come hither
Such sweets to wither;
The flowers laid down their heads to die,
And Love looked pale as the witch drew nigh.

"She came one morning, and Love had warning,
For he stood at the window, peeping for day:
'Oh, oh,' said he, 'is it you,—good bye'—
And he opened the window and flew away."

Dolly's love did not fly away, though the ugly witch, Poverty, was certainly showing herself. Mrs. Turk grew uneasy. Dolly assured her there was no occasion for that; that if the worst came to the worst, they must break into the "nest egg" which they had, lying by in the Bank of England—the three hundred pounds left her by her mother.

One bright day in May, Dolly, pining for the out-door sunshine, betook herself to Hyde Park, a penny

roll in her pocket for her dinner. The sun glittered in the blue sky, the air was warm, the birds chirped in the trees and hopped on the green grass. Dolly sat on a bench enjoying the sweetness and the tranquillity, thinking how very delightful life might be when no evil stepped in to mar it.

Two Quakeress ladies approached arm-in-arm, talking busily. Dolly started up with a cry: for the younger one was Elizabeth Deavor. She had come to London with a friend for the May meetings. The two girls were delighted to see each other, but Elizabeth was pressed for time.

"Why did thee never write to me, Dorothy? I had but one letter from thee, written at Gloucester, telling me, thee knows, all about thy poor father." And, to this question, Dolly murmured some lame excuse.

"I wanted to write to thee, but I had not thy address. I promised thee I would look out for Tom——"

"And have you seen him again?" interrupted Dolly in excitement. "Oh, Elizabeth?"

"I have seen the boy again, but it was not Tom: and I am very sorry that my fancy misled me and caused me to excite thy hopes. It was only recently, in Fourth month. I saw the same boy standing in the same place before thy old gate, his arms folded, and looking at the house as before, in the moonlight. I ran out, and caught his arm, and held it while he told

me who he was and why he came there. It was not thy brother, Dorothy, but the likeness to him is marvellous."

"No?—not he?" gasped Dolly, woefully disappointed.

"It is one Richard East," said Elizabeth; "a young sailor. He lived with his mother in that house before she died, when he was a little boy; and when he comes home from a voyage now, and is staying with his friends in Melcheapen Street, he likes to go up there and have a good look at it. This is all. As I say, I am sorry to have misled thee. We think there cannot be a doubt that poor Tom really lost his life that night in the canal. And art thee nicely, Dorothy? —and is thy husband well? Thee art looking thin. Fare thee well."

Summer passed, Dolly hardly knew how. She was often reduced to straits, often and often went dinnerless. Mrs. Turk only had a portion of what was due to her by fits and starts. Mr. Mapping himself made light of troubles; they did not seem to touch him much; he was always in spirits and always well dressed.

"Alick, you should draw a little of that money in the bank," his wife ventured to suggest one day when Mrs. Turk had been rather troublesome. "We cannot go on like this."

"Break in upon our 'nest egg!'" he answered. "Not if I know it, Dolly. Mrs. Turk must wait."

A little circumstance was to happen that gave some puzzle to Dolly. She had been married about fourteen months, and her husband was, as she believed, on his travels in Yorkshire, when Lord Mayor's day occurred. Mrs. Turk, a good woman in the main, and compassionating the loneliness of the young wife, offered to take her to see the show, having been invited to an upper window of a house in Cheapside. Of all the sights in the world that Dolly had heard of, she quite believed that must be the greatest, and felt delighted. They went, took up their station at the window, and the show passed. If it had not quite come up to Dolly's expectation, she did not say so.

"A grand procession, is it not, Mrs. Mapping," cried her companion, gazing after the tail of it with admiring eyes.

"Very," said Dolly. "I wonder—Good gracious!" she broke off, with startling emphasis, "there's my husband!"

"Where?" asked Mrs. Turk, her eyes bent on the surging crowd below.

"There," said Dolly, pointing with her finger; "there! He is arm-in-arm with two others; in the middle of them. How very strange! It was only yesterday I had a letter from him from Bradford, saying he should be detained there for some time to

come. How I wished he had looked up at this window!"

Mrs. Turk's sight had failed to single him out amid the moving masses. And as Mr. Mapping did not make his appearance at home that evening, or for many evenings to come, she concluded that the young wife must have been mistaken.

When Mr. Mapping did appear, he said the same, telling Dolly she must have "seen double," for that he had not been in London. Dolly did not insist, but she felt staggered and uncomfortable; she felt *certain* it was her husband she saw.

How long the climax would have been postponed, or in what way it might have disclosed itself, but for something that occurred, cannot be conjectured. This wretched kind of life went on until the next spring. Dolly was reduced to perplexity. She had parted with all the pretty trinkets her mother left her; she would live for days together upon bread-and-butter and tears: and a most unhappy suspicion had instilled itself into her mind—that the nest-egg no longer existed. But even yet she found excuses for her husband; she thought that all doubt might still be explained away. Mrs. Turk was very good, and did not worry; Dolly did some plain sewing for her, and made her a gown or two.

On one of these spring days, when the sun was shining brightly on the pavement outside, Dolly went

out on an errand. She had not gone many steps from the door when a lady, very plainly dressed, came up and accosted her quietly.

"Young woman, I wish to ask why you have stolen away my husband?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the startled Dolly. "What do you mean?"

"You call yourself Mrs. Mapping."

"I am Mrs. Mapping."

The stranger shook her head. "We cannot converse here," she said. "Allow me to go up to your room"—pointing to it. "I know you lodge there."

"But what is it that you want with me?" objected Dolly, who did not like all this.

"You think yourself the wife of Alick Mapping. You think you were married to him."

Dolly wondered whether the speaker had escaped from that neighbouring stronghold, Bedlam. "I don't know what it is you wish to insinuate," she said. "I was married to Mr. Mapping at St. Martin's Church in Worcester, more than eighteen months ago."

"Ay! But I, his wife, was married to him in London seven years ago. Yours was no marriage; he deceived you."

Dolly's face was turning all manner of colours. She felt frightened nearly to death.

"Take me to your room and I will tell you all that you need to know. Do not fear I shall reproach

you; I am only sorry for you; it has been no fault of yours. He is a finished deceiver, as I have learnt to my cost."

Dolly led the way. Seated together, face to face, her eyes strained on the stranger's, she listened to the woeful tale, which was gently told. That it was true she could not doubt. Alick Mapping had married her at St. Martin's Church in Worcester, but he had married this young woman some years previous to it.

"You are thinking that I look older than my husband," said she, misinterpreting Dolly's gaze. "That is true. I am five years older, and am now approaching my fortieth year. He pretended to fall in love with me; I thought he did; but what he really fell in love with was my money."

"How did you come to know about me?—how did you find it out?" gasped Dolly.

"It was through Mrs. Turk, your landlady," answered the true wife. "She has been suspecting that something or other was wrong, and she talked of it to a friend of hers who chances to know my family. This friend was struck with the similarity of name—the Alick Mapping whose wife was here in the Blackfriars Road, and the Alick Mapping whose wife lived at Hackney."

"How long is it since he left you?" asked poor Dolly.

"He has not left me. He has absented himself inexplicably at times for a year or two past, but he is still with me. He is at home now, at this present moment. I have a good home, you must understand, and a good income, which he cannot touch; he would think twice before giving up that. Had you money?" continued the lady abruptly.

"I had three hundred pounds. He told me he had placed it in the Bank of England; I think he did do that; and that he should never draw upon it, but leave it there for a nest-egg."

Mrs. Mapping smiled in pity. "You may rely upon it that there's not a shilling left of it. Money in his hands, when he can get hold of any, runs out of them like water."

"Is it true that he travels for a wine house?"

"Yes—and no. It is his occupation, but he is continually throwing up his situations: pleasure has more attraction for him than work; and he will be a gentleman at large for months together. Yet not a more clever man of business exists than he is known to be, and he can get a place at any time."

"Have you any children?" whispered Dolly.

"No. Shall you prosecute him?" continued the first wife, after a pause.

"Shall I—what?" cried Dolly, aghast.

"Prosecute him for the fraud he has committed on you?"

"Oh, dear! the exposure would kill me," shivered the unhappy girl. "I shall only hope to run away and hide myself for ever."

"Every syllable I have told you is truth," said the stranger, producing a slip of paper as she rose to depart. "Here are two or three references by which you can verify it, if you doubt me. Mrs. Turk will do it for you if you do not care to stir in it yourself. Will you shake hands with me?"

Dolly assented, and burst into a whirlwind of tears.

Nothing seemed to be left for her, as she said, but to run away and hide herself. All the money was gone, and she was left penniless and helpless. By the aid of Mrs. Turk, who proved a good friend to her, she obtained a situation in a small preparatory school near Croydon, as needle-woman and companion to the mistress. She called herself Mrs. Mapping still, and continued to wear her wedding ring; she did not know what else to do. She *had* been married; truly, as she had believed; and what had come of it was surely no fault of hers.

A little good fortune fell to her in time; a little bit. For years and years she remained in that school at Croydon, until, as it seemed to herself, she was middle-aged, and then the mistress of it died. Having no relatives, she left her savings and her furniture to Dolly. With the money Dolly set up the house in

Gibraltar Terrace, put the furniture into it, and began to let lodgings. A young woman, who had been teacher in the school, and whom Dolly regarded as her sister, and often called her so, removed to it with her and stayed with her until she married.

These particulars—which we listened to one evening from her own lips—were gloomy enough. The Squire went into an explosion over Alick Mapping.

"The despicable villain! What has become of him?"

"I never saw him after his wife came to me," she answered, "but Mrs. Turk would get news of him now and then. Since Mrs. Turk's death, I have heard nothing. Sometimes I think he may be dead."

"I hope he was hung!" flashed the Squire.

Well—to hasten on. That was Dorothy Grape's history since she left Worcester; and a cruel one it was!

We saw her once or twice again before quitting London. And the Squire left a substantial present with her, for old remembrance sake.

"She looks as though she needed it, Johnny," said he. "Poor thing! poor thing! And such a pretty, happy little maiden as she used to be, standing in her pinafore amid the yellow roses in the porch at Islip! Johnny, lad, I *hope* that vagabond came to be hanged!"

II.

It was ever so long afterwards, and the time had gone on by years, when we again fell into the thread of Dorothy Grape's life. The Squire was in London for a few days upon some law business, and had brought me with him.

"I should like to see how that poor woman's getting on, Johnny," he said to me one morning. "Suppose we go down to Gibraltar Terrace?"

It was a dull, damp, misty day at the close of autumn; and when the Squire turned in at No. 60, after dismissing the cab, he stood still and stared, instead of knocking. A plate was on the door, "James Noak, carpenter and joiner."

"Has she left, do you think, Johnny?"

"Well, sir, we can ask. Perhaps the carpenter is only lodging here?"

A tidy young woman, with a baby in her arms, answered the knock. "Does Mrs. Mapping live here still?" asked the Squire.

"No, sir," she answered. "I don't know the name."

"Not know the name!" retorted he, turning crusty;

for he disliked, of all things, to be puzzled or thwarted. "Mrs. Mapping lived here for ten or a dozen years, anyhow."

"Oh stay, sir," she said, "I remember the name now. Mapping; yes, that was it. She lived here before we came in."

"Is she dead?"

"No, sir. She was sold up."

"Sold up?"

"Yes, sir. Her lodging-letting fell off—this neighbourhood's not what it was: people like to get further up, Islington way—and she was badly off for a long while, could not pay her rent, or anything; so at last the landlord was obliged to sell her up. At least, that's what we heard after we came here, but the house lay empty for some months between. I did not hear what became of her."

The people at the next house could not tell anything; they were fresh comers also; and the Squire stood in a quandary. I thought of Pitt the surgeon; he was sure to know; and ran off to his surgery in the next street.

Changes seemed to be everywhere. Pitt's small surgery had given place to a chemist's shop. The chemist stood behind his counter in a white apron. Pitt? Oh, Pitt had taken to a practice further off, and drove his brougham. "Mrs. Mapping?" added the chemist, in further answer to me. "Oh, yes, she

lives still in the same terrace. She came to grief at No. 60, poor woman, and lodges now at No. 32. Same side of the way; this end."

No. 32 had its plate on the door: Miss Kester, dressmaker:" and Miss Kester herself—a neat little woman, with a reserved, not to say sour, face and manner, and a cloud of pins sticking out of her brown waistband—answered the knock. She sent us up to a small back room at the top of the house.

Mrs. Mapping sat sewing near a fireless grate, her bed in one corner; she looked very ill. I had thought her thin enough before; she was a shadow now. The blue eyes had a piteous look in them, the cheeks a red-leafed hectic.

"Yes," she said, in answer to the Squire, her voice faint and her cough catching her every other minute, "it was a sad misfortune for me to be turned out of my house; it nearly broke my heart. The world is full of trouble, sir."

"How long is it since?"

"Nearly eighteen months, sir. Miss Kester had this room to let, and I came into it. It is quiet and cheap; only half a crown a week."

"And how do you get the half-crown?" questioned the Squire. "And your dinner and breakfast—how do you get that?"

Mrs. Mapping passed her trembling fingers across her face before she answered:

"I'm sorry to have to tell of these things, sir. I'm sorry you have found me out in my poverty. When I think of the old days at home, the happy and plentiful days when poor mother was living, and what a different life mine might have been but for the dreadful marriage I made, I—I can hardly bear up against it. I'm sure I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for giving way."

For the tears were streaming down her thin cheeks. The Squire set up a cough on his own account; I went to the window and looked down at some grimy back-gardens.

"When I am a little stronger, and able to do a full day's work again, I shall get on, sir, but I've been ill lately through going out in the wet and catching cold," she said, mastering the tears. "Miss Kester is very good in supplying me with as much as I can do."

"A grand 'getting on,'" cried the Squire. "You'd be all the better for some fire in that grate."

"I might be worse off than I am," she answered meekly. "If it is but little that I have, I am thankful for it."

The Squire talked a while longer; then he put a sovereign into her hand, and came away with a gloomy look.

"She wants a bit of regular help," said he. "A few shillings paid to her weekly while she gets up her

strength might set her going again. I wonder if we could find anybody to undertake it?"

"You would not leave it with herself in a lump, sir?"

"Why, no, I think not; she may have back debts, you see, Johnny, and be tempted to pay them with it; if so, practically it would be no good to her. Wish Pitt lived here still! Wonder if that Miss Kester might be trusted to—— There's a cab, lad! Hail it."

The next morning, when we were at breakfast at the hotel—which was not the Tavistock this time—the Squire burst into a state of excitement over his newspaper.

"Goodness me, Johnny! here's the very thing."

I wondered what had taken him, and what he meant; and for some time did not clearly understand. The Squire's eyes had fallen upon an advertisement, and also a leading article, treating of some great philanthropic movement that had recently set itself up in London. Reading the articles, I gathered that it had for its object the distribution of alms on an extensive scale and the comprehensive relieving of the distressed. Some benevolent gentlemen (so far as we could understand the newspaper) had formed themselves into a band for taking the general welfare of the needy into their hands, and devoted their lives to looking after their poverty-stricken brothers and sisters.

A sort of universal, benevolent, set-the-world-to-rights invention.

The Squire was in raptures. "If we had but a few more such good men in the world, Johnny! I'll go down at once and shake their hands. If I lived in London, I'd join them."

I could only laugh. Fancy the Squire going about from house to house with a bag of silver to relieve the needy!

Taking note of the office occupied by these good men, we made our way to it. Only two of them were present that morning: a man who looked like a clerk, for he had books and papers before him; and a thin gentleman in spectacles.

The Squire shook him by the hand at once, breaking into an ovation at the good deeds of the benevolent brotherhood, that should have made the spectacles before us, as belonging to a member of it, blush.

"Yes," he said, his cool, calm tones contrasting with the Squire's hot ones, "we intend to effect a work that has never yet been attempted. Why, sir, by our exertions three parts of the complaints of hunger, and what not, will be done away with."

The Squire folded his hands in an ecstacy of reverence. "That is, you will relieve it," he remarked. "Bountiful Samaritans!"

"Relieve it, certainly—where the recipients are found to be deserving," returned the other. "But non-

deserving cases—impostors, ill-doers, and the like—will get punishment instead of relief, if we can procure it for them."

"Quite right, too," warmly assented the Squire. "Allow me to shake your hand again, sir. And you gentlemen are out every day upon this good work! Visiting from house to house!"

"Some of us are out every day; we devote our time to it."

"And your money, too, of course!" exclaimed the Squire. "Listen, Johnny Ludlow," he cried, turning to me, his red face glowing more and more with every word, "I hope you'll take a lesson from this, my lad! Their time, and their money too!"

The thin gentleman cleared his throat. "Of course we cannot do all in the way of money ourselves," he said; "some of us, indeed, cannot do anything in that way. Our operations are very large: a great deal is needed, and we have to depend upon a generous public for help."

"By their making subscriptions to it?" cried the Squire.

"Undoubtedly."

The Squire tugged at an inner pocket. "Here, Johnny, help me to get out my cheque-book." And when it was out, he drew a cheque for ten pounds there and then, and laid it on the table.

"Accept this, sir," he said, "and my praises with

it. And now I should like to recommend to your notice a case myself—a most deserving one. Will you take it in hand?"

"Certainly."

The Squire gave Mrs. Mapping's address, telling briefly of her present distress and weakly state, and intimated that the best mode of relief would be to allow her a few shillings weekly. "You will be sure to see to her?" was his parting injunction. "She may starve if you do not."

"Have no fear: it is our business to do so," repeated the thin gentleman. "Good day."

"Johnny," said the Squire, going up the street sideways in his excitement, "it is refreshing to hear of these self-denying deeds. These good men must be going on straight for heaven!"

"Take care, sir! Look where you are going."

The Squire had not been going on straight himself just then, and had bumped up against a foot-passenger who was hurrying along. It was Pitt, the surgeon. After a few words of greeting, the Squire excused his flurry by telling him where he had come from.

"Been *there!*" exclaimed Pitt, bursting into a laugh. "Wish you joy, sir! We call it Benevolence Hall."

"And a very good name, too," said the Squire. "Such men ought to be canonized, Pitt."

"Hope they will be!" answered Pitt in a curious

kind of tone. "I can't stop now, Mr. Todhetley; am on my way to a consultation."

"He slips from one like an eel," cried the Squire, looking after the doctor as he hurried onwards: "I might have spoken to him about Mrs. Mapping. But my mind is at ease with regard to her, Johnny, now that these charitable men have the case in hand: and we shall be up again in a few weeks."

III.

It was nearly two months before we were again in London, and winter weather: the same business, connected with a lawsuit, calling the Squire up.

"And now for Mrs. Mapping," he said to me during the afternoon of the second day. So we went to Gibraltar Terrace.

"Yes, she is in her room," said Miss Kester in a resentful tone, when she admitted us. "It is a good thing somebody's come at last to see after her! I don't care to have her alone here on my hands to die."

"To die!" cried the Squire sharply, supposing the dressmaker spoke only in temper. "What is she dying of?"

"Starvation," answered Miss Kester.

"Why, what on earth do you mean, ma'am?" demanded he. "Starvation!"

"I've done what I could for her, so far as a cup of tea might go, and a morsel of bread-and-butter once a day, or perhaps a drop of broth," ran on Miss Kester in the same aggrieved tone of voice. "But it has been hard times with myself lately, and I have my

old mother to keep and a bedridden sister. What she has wanted is a supply of nourishing food; and she has had as good as none of any sort since you were here, sir, being too weak to work: and so, rapid consumption set in."

She whisked upstairs with the candle, for the short winter day was already closing, and we followed her. Mrs. Mapping sat in an old easy chair, over a handful of fire, her thin cotton shawl folded round her: white, panting, attenuated, starved; and—there could not be much mistake in it—dying.

"Starved? dying? dear, dear!" ejaculated the Squire, backing to the other chair and sitting down in a sort of terror. "What has become of the good people at Benevolence Hall?"

"They!" cried Miss Kester contemptuously. "You don't suppose those people would spend money to keep a poor woman from dying, do you, sir?"

"Why, it is their business to do it," said the Squire. "I put Mrs. Mapping's case into their hands, and they undertook to see to it."

"To see to it, perhaps, sir, but not to relieve it; I should be surprised if they did that. One of them called here ever so many weeks ago and frightened Mrs. Mapping with his harsh questions; but he gave her nothing."

"I don't understand all this," cried the Squire,

rumpling back his hair. "Was it a gentleman?"—turning to Mrs. Mapping.

"He was dressed as one," she said, "but he was loud and dictatorial, almost as though he thought me a criminal instead of a poor sick woman. He asked me all kinds of questions about my past life, where I had lived and what I had done, and wrote down the answers."

"Go on," said the Squire, as she paused for breath.

"As they sent me no relief and did not come again, Miss Kester, after two or three weeks had gone by, was good enough to send a messenger to the place: her nephew. He saw the gentlemen there and told them I was getting weaker daily and was in dreadful need, if they would please to give me a trifle; he said he should never have thought of applying to them but for their having come to see after me. The gentlemen answered unfavourably; enquiries had been made, they sternly told him, and the case was found to be one not suitable for relief, that I did not deserve it. I—I— have never done anything wrong willingly," sobbed the poor woman, breaking down.

"I don't think she has, sir; she don't seem like it; and I'm sure she struggled hard enough to get a living at No. 60," said Miss Kester. "Anyway, they did nothing for her—they've just left her to starve and die."

I had seen the Squire in many a temper, but

never in a worse than now. He flung out of the room, calling upon me to follow him, and climbed into the hansom that waited for us outside.

"To Benevolence Hall," roared he, "and drive like the deuce."

"Yes, sir," said the man. "Where is Benevolence Hall?"

I gave him the address, and the man whirled us to Benevolence Hall in a short space of time. The Squire leaped out and indoors, finely primed. In the office stood a young man, going over some accounts by gaslight. His flaxen hair was parted down the middle, and he looked uncommonly simple. The rest of the benevolent gentlemen had left for the day.

What the Squire said at first, I hardly know: I don't think he knew himself. His words came tumbling out in a way that astonished the clerk.

"Mrs. Mapping," cried the young man, when he could understand a little what the anger was about. "Your ten pounds?—meant for her, you say—"

"Yes, my ten pounds," wrathfully broke in the Squire; "my ten-pound cheque that I paid down here on this very table. What have you done with it?"

"Oh, that ten pounds has been spent, partly so, at least, in making enquiries about the woman, looking-up her back history and that. Looking-up the back lives of people takes a lot of money, you see."

"But why did you not relieve her with it, or a

portion of it? That is the question I've come to ask, young man, and I intend to have it answered."

The young man looked all surprise. "Why, what an idea!" lisped he. "Our association does not profess to help sinners. That would be a go!"

"Sinners!"

"We can't be expected to take up a sinner, you know—and she's a topping one," continued he, keeping just as cool as the Squire was hot. "We found out all sorts of dreadful things against the woman. The name, Mapping, is not hers, to begin with. She went to church with a man who had a living wife——"

"She didn't," burst in the Squire. "It was the man who went to church with her. And I hope with all my heart he came to be hanged!"

The clerk considered. "It comes to the same, doesn't it?" said he vaguely. "She did go to church with him; and it was ever so long before his proper wife found it out; and she has gone on calling herself Mapping ever since! And she managed so badly in a lodging-house she set up, that she was sold out of it for rent. Consider that! Oh, indeed, then, it is not on such people as these that our good gentlemen would waste their money."

"What do they waste it on?" demanded the Squire.

"Oh, come now! They don't waste it. They spend it."

"What on? The sick and needy?"

"Well, you see, the object of this benevolent association is to discover who is deserving and who is not. When an applicant comes or sends for relief, representing that he is sick and starving, and all the rest of it, we begin by searching out his back sins and misfortunes. The chances are that a whole lot of ill turns up. If the case be really deserving, and—and white, you know, instead of black—we relieve it."

"That is, you relieve about one case in a hundred, I expect?" stormed the Squire.

"Oh, now you can't want me to go into figures," said the clerk, in his simple way. "Anybody might know, if they've got some knowledge of the world, that an out-and-out deserving case does not turn up often. Besides, our business is not relief but inquiry. We do relieve sometimes, but we chiefly inquire."

"Now look you here," retorted the Squire. "Your object, the enquiring into cases, may be a good one in the main and do some excellent service; I say nothing against it; but the public hold the impression that it is *relief* your association intends, not enquiry. Why is this erroneous impression not set to rights?"

"Oh! but our system is, I assure you, a grand one," cried the young fellow. "It accomplishes an immense good."

"And how much harm does it accomplish? Hold your tongue, young man! Put it that an applicant is sick, starving, *dying*, for want of a bit of aid in the

shape of food, does your system give that bit of aid, just to keep body and soul together while it makes its enquiries—say only to the value of a few pence?"

The young fellow stared. "What a notion!" cried he. "Give help before finding out whether it ought to be given or not? That would be quite a Utopian way of fixing up the poor, that would."

"And do you suppose I should have given my ten pounds, but for being misled, for being allowed to infer that it would be expended on the distressed?" stamped the Squire. "Not a shilling of it. No money of mine shall aid in turning poor helpless creatures inside out to expose their sins, as you call it. *That's* not charity. What the sick and the famished want is a little kindly help—and the Bible enjoins us to give it."

"But most of them are such a bad lot, you know," remonstrated the young man.

"All the more need they should be helped," returned the Squire; "they have bodies and souls to be saved, I suppose. Hold your silly tongue, I tell you. I should have seen to this poor sick woman myself, who is just as worthy as you are and your masters, but for their taking the case in hand. As it is she has been left to starve and die. Come along, Johnny! Benevolence Hall, indeed!"

Back to Gibraltar Terrace now, the Squire fretting and fuming. He was hot and hasty, as the world

knows, given to say anything that came uppermost, justifiable or nonjustifiable: but in this affair it did seem that something or somebody must be wrong.

"Johnny," said the Squire, as the cab bowled along, waking up out of a brown reverie, "it seems to me that this is a serious matter of conscience. It was last Sunday evening, wasn't it, that you read the chapter in St. Matthew which tells of the last judgment?"

"Tod read it, sir. I read the one that followed it."

"Any way, it was one of you. In that chapter Christ charges us to relieve the poor if we would be saved—the hungry and thirsty, the sick, the naked. Now, see here, lad: if I give my alms to this new society that has sprung up, and never a stiver of it to relieve the distress that lies around me, would the blame rest on *me*, I wonder? Should *I* have to answer for it?"

It was too complicated a question for me. But just then we drew up at Miss Kester's door.

Mrs. Mapping had changed in that short time. I thought she was dying, thought so as I looked at her. There was a death-shade on the wan face, never seen but when the world is passing away. The Squire saw it also.

"Yes," said Miss Kester, gravely, in answer to his whisper. "I fear it is the end."

"Goodness bless me!" gasped the Squire. And he

was for ordering in pretty nearly every known restorative the shops keep, from turtle-soup to calves'-foot jelly. Miss Kester shook her head.

"Too late, sir; too late. A month ago it would have saved her. Now, unless I am very much mistaken, the end is at hand."

Well, he was in a way. If gold and silver could revive the dying, she'd have had it. He sent me out to buy a bottle of port wine, and got Miss Kester's little apprentice to run for the nearest doctor.

"Not rally again at all, you say! all stuff and nonsense," he was retorting on Miss Kester when I returned. "Here's the wine, at last! Now for a glass, Johnny."

She sipped about a teaspoonful by degrees. The shade on her face was getting darker. Her poor thin fingers kept plucking at the cotton shawl.

"I have never done any harm that I knew of: at least, not wilfully," she slowly panted, looking piteously at the Squire, evidently dwelling upon the accusation made by Benevolence Hall: and it had, Miss Kester said, troubled her frightfully. "I was only silly—and inexperienced—and—and believed in everybody. Oh, sir, it was hard!"

"I'd prosecute them if I could," cried the Squire, fiercely. "There, there; don't think about it any more; it's all over."

"Yes, it is over," she sighed, giving the words a

different meaning from his. "Over; over: the struggles and the disappointments, the privations and the pain. Only God sees what mine have been, and how I've tried to bear up in patience. Well, well; He knows best: and I think—I do think, sir—He will make it up to us in Heaven. My poor mother thought the same when she was dying."

"To be sure," answered the Squire, soothingly. "One must be a heathen not to know that. Hang that set-the-world-to-rights company!" he muttered in a whisper.

"The bitterness of it all has left me," she whispered, with pauses between the words for want of breath; "this world is fading from my sight, the world to come opening. Only this morning, falling asleep in the chair here, after the fatigue of getting up—and putting on my things—and coughing—I dreamt I saw the Saviour holding out His hand to welcome me, and I knew He was waiting to take me up to God. The clouds round about Him were of a soft rose colour; a light, as of gold, lay in the distance. Oh, how lovely it was! nothing but peace. Yes, yes, God will forgive all our trials and our shortcomings, and make it up to us there."

The room had a curious hush upon it. It hardly seemed to be a living person speaking. Anyway, she would not be living long.

"Another teaspoonful of wine, Johnny," whispered

the Squire. "Dear, dear! Where on earth can that doctor be?"

I don't believe a drop of it went down her throat. Miss Kester wiped away the damp from her brow. A cough took her; and afterwards she lay back again in the chair.

"Do you remember the yellow roses in the porch," she murmured, speaking, as must be supposed, to the Squire, but her eyes were closed: "how the dew on them used to glisten again in the sun on a summer's morning?—I was picking such a handful of them last night—beautiful roses, they were; sweet and beautiful as the flowers we shall pick in Heaven."

The doctor came upstairs, his shoes creaking. It was Pitt. Pitt! The girl had met him by chance, and told him what was amiss.

"Ah," said he, bending over the chair, "you have called me too late. I should have been here a month or two ago."

"She is dying of starvation," said the Squire in a sort of foaming whisper. "All that money—ten pounds—which I handed over to that blessed fraternity, and they never gave her a sixpence of it—after assuring me they'd see to her!"

"Ah," said Pitt, his mouth taking a comical twist. "They meant they'd see after her antecedents, I take it, not her needs. Quite a blessed fraternity, I'm sure, as you say, Squire."

He turned away to Mrs. Mapping. But nothing could be done for her; even the Squire, with all his impetuosity, saw that. Never another word did she speak, never another recognising gaze did she give. She just passed quietly away with a sigh as we stood looking at her; passed to that blissful realm we are all travelling to, and which had been the last upon her lips—Heaven.

And that is the true story of Dorothy Grape.

LADY JENKINS.

MINA.

I.

"Had I better go? I should like to."

"Go! why of course you had better go," answered the Squire, putting down the letter.

"It will be the very thing for you, Johnny," added Mrs. Todhetley. "We were saying yesterday that you ought to have a change."

I had not been well for some time; not strong. My old headaches stuck to me worse than usual; Duffham complained that the pulse was feeble. Therefore a letter from Dr. Knox of Lefford, pressing me to go and stay with them, seemed to have come on purpose. Janet had added a postscript: "You *must* come, Johnny Ludlow, if it is only to see my two babies, and you must not think of staying less than a month." Tod was from home, visiting in Leicestershire.

Three days, and I was off, bag and baggage. To Worcester first, and then onwards again, direct for Lefford. The very journey seemed to do me good. It was a lovely spring day: the hedges were bursting into bud; primroses and violets nestled in the mossy banks.

You have not forgotten, I daresay, how poor Janet Carey's hard life, her troubles, and the sickness those troubles brought, culminated in a brave ending when Arnold Knox, of Lefford, made her his wife. Some five years had elapsed since then, and we were all of us that much older. They had asked me to visit them over and over again, but until now I had not done it. Mr. Tamlyn, Arnold's former master and present partner, with whom they lived, was getting in years; he only attended to a few of the old patients now.

It was a cross-grained kind of route, and much longer than it need have been could we have gone straight as a bird flies. The train made all kinds of detours, and I had to change no less than three times. For the last few miles I had had the carriage to myself, but at Toome Junction, the last station before Lefford, a gentleman got in: a rather elderly man with grey hair. Not a syllable did we say, one to another —Englishmen like—and at length Lefford was gained.

"In to time exactly," cried this gentleman then, peering out at the gas-lighted station. "The clock's on the stroke of eight."

Getting my portmanteau, I looked about for Dr. Knox's brougham, which would be waiting for me, and soon pitched upon one, standing near the flys. But my late fellow passenger strode on before me.

"I thought I spied you out, Wall," he said to the

coachman. "Quite a chance your being here, I suppose?"

"I'm waiting for a gentleman from Worcester, sir," answered the man, looking uncommonly pleased, as he touched his hat. "Dr. Knox couldn't come himself."

"Well, I suppose you can take me as well as the gentleman from Worcester," answered the other, as he turned round from patting the old horse, and saw me standing there. And we got into the carriage.

It proved to be Mr. Shuttleworth, he who had been old Tamlyn's partner for a short while, and had married his sister. Tamlyn's people did not know he was coming to-night, he told me. He was on his way to a distant place, to see a relative who was ill; by making a round of it, he could take Lefford, and drop in at Mr. Tamlyn's for the night—and was doing so.

Janet came running to the door, Mr. Tamlyn walking slowly behind her. He had a sad countenance, and scanty grey hair, and looked ever so much older than his actual years. Since his son died, poor Bertie, the sunshine of life had gone out for him. Very much surprised were they to see Mr. Shuttleworth as well as me.

Janet gave us a sumptuous tea-dinner, pouring out unlimited cups of tea and pressing us to eat all the good things. Except that she had filled out a little from the skeleton she was, and looked as joyous now

as she had once looked sad, I saw little difference in her. Her boy, Arnold, was aged three and a half: the little girl, named Margaret, after Miss Deveen, could just walk.

"Never were such children in all the world before, if you listen to Janet," cried old Tamlyn, looking at her fondly—for he had learnt to love Janet as he would a daughter — and she laughed shyly and blushed.

"You don't ask after mine," put in Mr. Shuttleworth, quaintly; "my one girl. She is four years old now. Such a wonder! such a paragon! other babies are nothing to it; so Bessy says. Bessy is silly over that child, Tamlyn."

Old Tamlyn just shook his head. They suddenly remembered the one only child he had lost, and changed the subject.

"And what about everything?" asked Mr. Shuttleworth, lighting a cigar, as we sat round the fire after dinner, Janet having gone out to see to a room for Shuttleworth, or perhaps to contemplate her sleeping babies. "I am glad you have at last given up the parish work."

"There's enough to do without it; the practice increases daily," cried Tamlyn. "Arnold is so much liked."

"How are all the old patients?"

"That is a comprehensive question," smiled Tam-

lyn. "Some are flourishing, and some few are, of course, dead."

"Is Dockett with you still?"

"No. Dockett is in London at St. Thomas's. Sam Jenkins is with us in his place. A clever young fellow; worth two of Dockett."

"Who is Sam Jenkins?"

"A nephew of Lady Jenkins—you remember her? At least, of her late husband's."

"I should think I do remember Lady Jenkins," laughed Shuttleworth. "How is she? Flourishing about the streets as usual in that red-wheeled carriage of hers, dazzling as the rising sun?"

"Lady Jenkins is not well," replied Tamlyn, gravely. "She gives me some concern."

"In what way does she give you concern?"

"Chiefly because I can't find out what it is that's amiss with her?"

"Has she been ill long?"

"For some months now. She is not very ill: goes out in her carriage to dazzle the town, as you observe, and has her regular soirées at home. But I don't like her symptoms: I don't understand them, and they get worse. She has never been well, to say really well, since that French journey."

"What French journey?"

"At the end of last summer, my Lady Jenkins must needs get it into her head that she should like

to see Paris. Stupid old thing, to go all the way to France for the first time in her life! She did go, taking Mina Knox with her—who is growing up as pretty a girl as you'd wish to see. And, by the way, Shuttleworth, Mina is in luck. She has had a fortune left her. An old gentleman, not related to them at all, except that he was Mina's godfather, left her seven thousand pounds last year in his will. Arnold is trustee."

"I am glad of it. Little Mina and I used to be great friends. Her mother is as disagreeable as ever, I suppose?"

"As if she'd ever change from being *that!*" returned Tamlyn. "I have no patience with her. She fritters away her own income, and then comes here and worries Arnold's life out with her embarrassments. He does for her more than I should do. Educates young Dicky, for one thing."

"No doubt. Knox always had a soft place in his heart. But about Lady Jenkins?"

"Lady Jenkins went over to Paris with her maid, taking Mina as her companion. It was in August. They stayed three weeks there, racketing about to all kinds of show places, and over-doing it finely. When they got to Boulogne on their way back, expecting to cross over at once, they found they had to wait. A gale was raging, and the boats could not get out. So they put up at an hotel there; and, that night, Lady

Jenkins was taken alarmingly ill—the journey and the racketing and the French living had been too much for her. Young people can stand these things, Johnny Ludlow; old ones can't," added Tamlyn, looking at me across the hearth.

"Very true, sir. How old is Lady Jenkins?"

"Just seventy. But you'd not have thought her so much before that French journey. Until then she was a lively, active, bustling woman, with a good-natured, pleasant word for everybody. Now she is weary, dull, inanimate; seems to be, half her time, in a kind of lethargy."

"What was the nature of the illness?" asked Shuttleworth. "A seizure?"

"No, nothing of that sort. I'm sure I don't know what it was," added old Tamlyn, rubbing back his scanty grey hair in a kind of perplexity. "Anyway, they feared she was going to die. The French doctor said her getting well was a miracle. She lay ill ten days, keeping her bed, and was still ill and very weak when she reached home. Mina believes that a lady who was detained at the same hotel by the weather, and who came forward and offered her services as nurse, saved Lady Jenkins's life. She was so kind and attentive; never going to her bed afterwards until Lady Jenkins was up from hers. She came home with them."

"Who did? This lady?"

"Yes; and has since remained with Lady Jenkins as companion. She is a Madame St. Vincent; a young widow——"

"A Frenchwoman!" exclaimed Mr. Shuttleworth.

"Yes; but you'd not think it. She speaks English just as we do, and looks English. A very nice, pleasant young woman; as kind and loving to Lady Jenkins as though she were her daughter. I am glad they fell in with her. She——oh, is it you, Sam?"

A tall smiling young fellow of eighteen, or so, had come in. It was Sam Jenkins: and, somehow, I took to him at once. Mr. Shuttleworth shook hands and said he was glad to hear he promised to be a second Abernethy. Upon which Sam's wide mouth opened in glee, showing a set of nice teeth.

"I thought Dr. Knox was here, sir," he said to Mr. Tamlyn, as if he would apologise for entering.

"Dr. Knox is gone over to the Brook, but I should think he'd be back soon now. Why? Is he wanted?"

"Only a message, sir, from old Willoughby's. They'd like him to call there as soon as convenient in the morning."

Now, Sam, don't you be irreverent," reproved his master. "*Old* Willoughby! I should say Mr. Willoughby if I were you. He is no older than I am. You young men of the present day are becoming very disrespectful; it was different in my time."

Sam laughed pleasantly. Close upon that, Dr.

Knox came in. He was more altered than Janet, looking graver and older, his light hair as wild as ever. He was just thirty now.

Mr. Shuttleworth left in the morning, and afterwards Dr. Knox took me to see his step-mother. Her house (but it was his house, not hers), Rose Villa, was in a suburb of the town, called the London Road. Mrs. Knox was a dark, unpleasing looking woman; her voice harsh, her crinkled black hair untidy—it was never anything else in a morning. The two eldest girls were in the room. Mina was seventeen, Charlotte twelve months younger. Mina was the prettiest; a fair girl with a mild face and pleasant blue eyes, her manner and voice as quiet as her face. Charlotte seemed rather strong-minded.

"Are you going to the soirée next door to-night, Arnold?" cried Mrs. Knox, as we were leaving.

"I think not," he answered. "Janet wrote to decline."

"You wished her to decline, I daresay!" retorted Mrs. Knox. "You always did despise the soirées, Arnold."

Dr. Knox laughed pleasantly. "I have never had much time for soirées," he said; "and Janet does not care for them. Besides, we think it unkind to leave Mr. Tamlyn alone." At which latter remark Mrs. Knox tossed her head.

"I must call on Lady Jenkins, as I am up here,"

observed Dr. Knox to me, when we were leaving. "You don't mind, do you, Johnny?"

"I shall like it. They were talking about her last night."

It was only a few yards higher up. A handsome dwelling, double the size of Rose Villa, with two big iron gates flanked by imposing pillars, on which was written in gold letters, as large as life, "Jenkins House."

Dr. Knox laughed. "Sir Daniel Jenkins rechristened it that," he said, dropping his voice, lest any ears should be behind the open windows: "it used to be called 'Rose Bank.' They moved up here four years ago; he was taken ill soon afterwards and died, leaving nearly all his money to his wife unconditionally: it is over four thousand a year. He was in business as a drysalter, and was knighted during the time he was mayor."

"Who will come in for the money?"

"That is as Lady Jenkins pleases. There are lots of relations, Jenkinses. Sir Daniel partly brought up two orphan nephews—at least, he paid for their schooling and left each a little money to place them out in life. You have seen the younger of them, Sam, who is with us; the other, Dan, is articled to a solicitor in the town, old Belford. Two other cousins are in the drysalting business; and the ironmonger, Sir Daniel's youngest brother, left several sons and daughters. The

old drysalter had no end of nephews and nieces, and might have provided for them all. Perhaps his widow will do so."

Not possessing the faintest idea of what "drysalting" might be, unless it had to do with curing hams, I was about to inquire, when the house door was thrown open by a pompous-looking gentleman in black —the butler—who showed us into the dining-room, where Lady Jenkins was sitting. I liked her at first sight. She was short and stout, and had pink cheeks and a pink turned-up nose, and wore a "front" of flaxen curls, surmounted by a big smart cap with red roses and blue ribbons in it; but there was not an atom of pretence about her, and her blue eyes were kindly. She took the hands of Dr. Knox in hers, and she shook mine warmly, saying she had heard of Johnny Ludlow.

Turning from her, I caught the eyes of a younger lady fixed upon me. She looked about seven-and-twenty, and wore a fashionable black-and-white muslin gown. Her hair was dark, her eyes were a reddish brown, her cheeks had a fixed bloom upon them. The face was plain, and it struck me that I had seen it somewhere before. Dr. Knox greeted her as Madame St. Vincent.

When we first went in, Lady Jenkins seemed to wake up from a doze. In two minutes she had fallen into a doze again, or as good as one. Her eyelids

drooped, she sat perfectly quiet, never speaking unless spoken to, and her face wore a kind of dazed, or stupid look. Madame St. Vincent talked enough for both of them; she appealed frequently to Lady Jenkins —"Was it not so, dear Lady Jenkins?"—or "Don't you remember that, dear Lady Jenkins?" and Lady Jenkins docilely answered "Yes, dear," or "Yes, Patty."

That Madame St. Vincent was a pleasant woman, as Mr. Tamlyn had said, and that she spoke English as we did, as he had also said, there could not be a doubt of. Her tongue could not be taken for any but a native tongue; moreover, unless my ears deceived me, it was native Worcestershire. Ever and anon, too, a homely word would be dropped by her in the heat of conversation that belonged to Worcestershire proper, and to no other county.

"You will come to my soirée this evening, Mr. Ludlow," Lady Jenkins woke up to say to me as we were leaving.

"Johnny can come; I daresay he would like to," put in Dr. Knox; "although I and Janet cannot——"

"Which is very churlish of you," interposed Madame St. Vincent.

"Well, you know what impediments lie in our way," he said, smiling. "Sam can come up with Johnny, if you like, Lady Jenkins."

"To be sure; let Sam come," she answered, readily. "How is Sam? and how does he get on?"

"He is very well, and gets on well."

Dr. Knox walked down the road in silence, looking grave. "Every time I see her she seems to me more altered," he observed presently, and I found he was speaking of Lady Jenkins. "*Something* is amiss with her, and I cannot tell what. I wish Tamlyn would let me take the case in hand!"

Two peculiarities obtained at Lefford. The one was that the universal dinner hour, no matter how much you might go in for fashion, was in the middle of the day; the other was that every evening gathering, no matter how unpretentious, was invariably called a "soirée." They were the customs of the town.

The soirée was in full sway when I reached Jenkins House that night—at six o'clock. Madame St. Vincent and Charlotte Knox sat behind the tea-table in a cloud of steam, filling the cups as fast as the company emptied them; a footman, displaying large white calves, carried round a tray of bread-and-butter and cake. Lady Jenkins sat near the fire in an easy chair, wearing a red velvet gown and lofty turban. She nodded to the people as they came in, and smiled at them with quite a silly expression. Mina and Charlotte Knox were in white muslin and pink roses. Mina looked very pretty indeed, and as mild

as milk; Charlotte was downright and strong-minded. Every five minutes or so, Madame St. Vincent—the white streamers on her rich black silk dress floating behind her—would leave the tea-table to run up to Lady Jenkins and ask if she wanted anything. Sam had not come with me: he had to go out unexpectedly with Dr. Knox.

"Mr. Jenkins," announced the pompous butler, showing in a tall young fellow of twenty. He had just the same sort of honest, good-natured face that had taken my fancy in Sam, and I guessed that this was his brother, the solicitor. He came up to Lady Jenkins.

"How do you do, aunt?" he said, bending to kiss her. "Hearing of your soirée to-night, I thought I might come."

"Why, my dear, you know you may come; you are always welcome. Which is it?" she added, looking up at him stupidly, "Dan, or Sam?"

"It is I—Dan," he answered: and if ever I heard pain in a tone, I heard it in his.

"You are Johnny Ludlow, I know!" he said, holding out his hand to me in the warmest manner, as he turned from his aunt. "Sam told me about you this morning." And we were friends from that moment.

Dan brought himself to an anchor by Mina Knox. He was no beauty certainly, but he had a good face.

Leaning over Mina's chair, he began whispering to her—and she whispered back again. Was there anything between them? It looked like it—at any rate, on his side—judging by his earnest expression and the loving looks that shot from his honest grey eyes.

"Are you really French?" I asked of Madame St. Vincent, while standing by her side to drink some tea.

"Really," she answered, smiling. "Why?"

"Because you speak English exactly like ourselves."

"I speak it better than I do French," she candidly said. "My mother was English, and her old maid-servant was English, and they educated me between them. It was my father who was French—and he died early."

"Was your mother a native of Worcestershire?"

"Oh dear no: she came from Wales. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Your accent is just like our Worcestershire accent. I am Worcestershire myself: and I could have thought you were."

She shook her head. "Never was there in my life, Mr. Ludlow. Is that why you looked at me so much when you were here with Dr. Knox this morning?"

"No: I looked at you because your face struck me as being familiar," I frankly said: "I thought I

must have seen you somewhere before. Have I, I wonder?"

"Very likely — if you have been much in the South of France," she answered: "at a place called Brétage."

"But I have never been at Brétage."

"Then I don't see how we can have met. I have lived there all my life. My father and mother died there; my poor husband died there. I only came away from it last year."

"It must be my fancy, I suppose. One does see likenesses——"

"Captain Collinson," shouted the butler again.

A military looking man, got up in the pink of fashion, loomed in with a lordly air; you'd have said the room belonged to him. At first he seemed all hair: bushy curls, bushy whiskers, a moustache, and a fine flowing beard, all of a purple black. Quite a flutter stirred the room: Captain Collinson was evidently somebody.

After making his bow to Lady Jenkins, he distributed his favours generally, shaking hands with this person, talking with that. At last he turned our way.

"Ah, how do you do, madame?" he said to Mme. St. Vincent, his tone ceremonious. "I fear I am late."

It was not a minute that he stood before her, only

while he said this: but, strange to say, something in his face or voice struck upon my memory. The face, as much as could be seen of it for hair, seemed familiar to me—just as madame's had seemed.

"Who is he?" I whispered to her, following him with my eyes.

"Captain Collinson."

"Yes, I heard the name. But—do you know anything of him?—who he is?"

She shook her head. "Not much; nothing of my own knowledge. He is in an Indian regiment, and is home on sick leave."

"I wonder which regiment it is? One of our fellows at Dr. Frost's got appointed to one in Madras, I remember."

"The 30th Bengal Cavalry, is Captain Collinson's. By his conversation, he appears to have spent nearly the whole of his life in India. It is said he is of good family, and has a snug private fortune. I don't know any more of him than that," concluded Madame St. Vincent, as she once more rose to go to Lady Jenkins.

"He may have a snug private fortune, and he may have family, but I do not like him," put in Charlotte Knox, in her decisive manner.

"Neither do I, Lotty," added Dan—who was then at the tea table: and his tone was just as emphatic as Charlotte's.

He had come up to get a cup of tea for Mina. Before he could carry it to her, Captain Collinson had taken up the place he had occupied at Mina's elbow, and was whispering to her in a most impressive manner. Mina seemed all in a flutter—and there was certainly no further room for Dan.

"Don't you want it now, Mina?" asked Dan, holding the cup towards her, and holding it in vain, for she was too much occupied to see it.

"Oh, thank you—no—I don't think I do want it now. Sorry you should have had the trouble."

Her words were just as fluttered as her manner. Dan brought the tea back and put it on the tray.

"Of course, she can't spare time to drink tea while *he* is there," cried Charlotte, resentfully, who had watched what passed. "That man has bewitched her, Dan."

"Not quite yet, I think," said Dan quietly. "He is trying to do it. There is no love lost between you and him, I see, Lotty."

"Not a ghost of it," nodded Lotty. "The town may be going wild in its admiration of him, but I am not; and the sooner he betakes himself back to India to his regiment, the better."

"I hope he will not take Mina with him," said Dan, gravely.

"I hope not, either. But she is silly enough for anything."

"Who is that, that's silly enough for anything?" cried Madame St. Vincent, whisking back to her place.

"Mina," promptly replied Charlotte. "She asked for a cup of tea, and then said she did not want it."

Some of the people sat down to cards; some to music; some talked. It was the usual routine at these soirées, Mrs. Knox condescended to inform me—and, what more, she added, could be wished for? Conversation, music, and cards—they were the three best diversions of life, she said, not that she herself much cared for music.

Poor Lady Jenkins did not join actively in any one of the three: she mostly dozed in her chair. When anybody spoke to her, she would wake up and say Yes or No; but that was all. Captain Collinson stood in a corner, talking to Mina behind a sheet of music. He appeared to be going over the bars with her, and to be as long doing it as if a whole opera were scored there.

At nine o'clock the supper-room was thrown open, and Captain Collinson handed in Lady Jenkins. Heavy suppers were not the mode at Lefford; neither, as a rule, did the guests sit down, except a few of the elder ones; but the table was covered with dainties. Sandwiches, meats in jelly, rissoles, lobster salad, and

similar things that could be eaten with a fork, were supplied in abundance, with sweets and jellies.

"I hope you'll be able to make a supper, my dear," said Lady Jenkins to me in her comfortable way—for the eating seemed to wake her up. "You see, if one person began to give a grand sitting-down supper—fowls and ham, and that kind of thing—others would think themselves obliged to do it, and everybody can't afford that. So we all confine ourselves to this."

"And I like this best," I said.

"Do you, my dear? I'm glad of that. You eat away now. Dan, is that you? Mind you make a good supper."

We both made a famous one. At least, I can answer for myself. And, at half-past ten, Dan and I departed together.

"How very good-natured Lady Jenkins seems to be!" I remarked.

"She is good-natured as the day, and always was," Dan warmly answered. "She has never been a bit different from what you see her to-night—kind to us all. You should have known her though in her best days, before she grew ill. I never saw anyone so altered."

"What is it that's the matter with her?"

"I don't know," answered Dan. "I wish I did know. Sam tells me Tamlyn does not know. I'm afraid he thinks it is the break-up of old age.—I'd be glad, though, if she did not patronise that Collinson so much."

"Everybody seems to patronise *him*."

"Or to let him patronise them," corrected Dan. "I can't like the fellow. He takes too much upon himself."

"He seems to be very popular. Quite the fashion."

"Yes, he is that. Since he came here, three or four months ago, the women have been running after him. Do *you* like him, Johnny Ludlow?" abruptly added Dan.

"I hardly know whether I do or not: I've not seen much of him," was my answer. "As a rule, I don't care for those people who take much upon themselves. The truth is, Dan," I laughed jokingly, "you think Collinson shows too much attention to Mina Knox."

Dan walked on for a few moments in silence. "I am not much afraid of that," he presently said. "It is the fellow himself I don't like."

"And you do like Mina?"

"Well—yes; I do. If Mina and I were older and my means justified it, I'd make her my wife to-morrow —I don't mind telling you so much. And if the man

is after her, it is for the sake of her money, mind, not for herself. I'm sure of it. I can see."

"I thought Collinson had plenty of money of his own."

"So he has, I believe. But money never comes amiss to an extravagant and idle man; and I think that Mina's money makes her attraction in Collinson's eyes. I wish with all my heart she had never had it left her!" continued Dan, explosively. "What did Mina want with seven thousand pounds?"

"I daresay you would not object to it, with herself."

"I'd as soon not have it. I hope I shall make my way in my profession, and make it well, and I would as soon take Mina without money as with. I'm sure her mother might have it, and welcome, for me! She is always hankering after it."

"How do you know she is?"

"We do her business at old Belford's, and she gets talking about the money to him, making no scruple of openly wishing it was hers. She bothers Dr. Knox, who is Mina's trustee, to lend her some of it. As if Knox would!—she might just as well go and bother the moon. No! But for that confounded seven thousand pounds Collinson would let Mina alone."

I shook my head. He could not know it. Mina was very pretty. Dan saw my incredulity.

"I will tell you why I judge so," he resumed, dropping his voice to a lower key. "Unless I am very much mistaken, Collinson likes somebody else—and that's Madame St. Vincent. Sam thinks so too."

It was more than I thought. They were cool to one another.

"But we have seen them when nobody else was by," contended Dan; "when he and she were talking together alone. And I can tell you that there was an expression on his face, an anxiousness, an eagerness —I hardly know how to word it—that it never wore for Mina. Collinson's love is given to Madame. Rely upon that."

"Then, why should he not declare it?"

"Ah, I don't know. There may be various reasons. Her poverty perhaps—for she has nothing but the salary Lady Jenkins pays her. Or, he may not care to marry one who is only a companion: they say he is of good family himself. Another reason, and possibly the most weighty one, may be, that Madame does not like him."

"I don't think she does like him."

"I am sure she does not. She gives him angry looks, and she turns away from him with ill-disguised coldness. And so, that's about how the state of affairs

lies up there," concluded Dan, shaking hands with me as we reached the door of his lodgings. "Captain Collinson's love is given to Madame St. Vincent, on the one hand, and to Mina's money on the other; and I think he is in a pretty puzzle which of the two to choose. Good night, Johnny Ludlow. Be sure to remember this is only between ourselves."

II.

A WEEK, or so, passed on. Janet was up to her eyes in preparations, expecting a visitor. And the visitor was no other than Miss Cattledon—if you have not forgotten her. Being fearfully particular in all ways, and given to fault-finding, as poor Janet only too well remembered, of course it was necessary to have things in apple-pie order.

"I should never hear the last of it as long as Aunt Jemima stayed, if so much as a speck of dust was in any of the rooms, or a chair out of place," said Janet to me laughingly, as she and the maids dusted and scrubbed away.

"What's she coming for, Janet?"

"She invited herself," replied Janet: "and indeed we shall be glad to see her. Miss Deveen is going to visit some friends in Devonshire, and Aunt Jemima takes the opportunity of coming here the while. I am sorry Arnold is so busy just now. He will not have much time to give to her—and she likes attention."

The cause of Dr. Knox's increased occupation, was Mr. Tamlyn's illness. For the past few days he had had feverish symptoms, and did not go out. Few

medical men would have found the indisposition sufficiently grave to remain at home for; but Mr. Tamlyn was an exception. He gave in at the least thing now: and it was nothing at all unusual for Arnold Knox to find all the patients thrown on his own hands.

Amidst the patients so thrown this time was Lady Jenkins. She had caught cold at that soirée I have just told of. Going to the door in her old-fashioned, hospitable way, to speed the departure of the last guests, she had stayed there in the draught, talking, and began at once to sneeze and cough.

"There!" cried Madame St. Vincent, when my lady got back again, "you have gone and got a chill."

"I think I have," admitted Lady Jenkins. "I'll send for Tamlyn in the morning."

"Oh, my dear Lady Jenkins, we shall not want Tamlyn," dissented Madame. "I'll take care of you myself and have you well in no time."

But Lady Jenkins, though very much swayed by her kind companion, who was ever anxious for her, chose to have up Mr. Tamlyn, and sent him a private message herself.

He went up at once—evidently taking Madame by surprise—and saw his patient. The cold, being promptly treated, turned out to be a mere nothing, though Madame St. Vincent insisted on keeping the sufferer some days in bed. By the time Mr. Tamlyn was ill, she was well again, and there was not much

necessity for Dr. Knox to take her: at least, on the score of her cold. But he did it.

One afternoon, when he was going up there late, he asked me if I would like the drive. And, while he paid his visit to Lady Jenkins, I went in to Rose Villa. It was a fine, warm afternoon, almost like summer, and Mrs. Knox and the girls were sitting in the garden. Dicky was there also. Dicky was generally at school from eight o'clock till six, but this was a half holiday. Dicky, eleven years old now, but very little of his age, was more troublesome than ever. Just now he was at open war with his two younger sisters and Miss Mack, the governess, who had gone indoors to escape him.

Leaning against the trunk of a tree, as he talked to Mrs. Knox, Mina, and Charlotte, stood Captain Collinson, the rays of the sun, now drawing westerly, shining full upon him, bringing out the purple glow of his hair, whiskers, beard, and moustache deeper than usual. Captain Collinson incautiously made much of Dicky, had told him attractive stories of the glories of war, and promised him a commission when he should be old enough. The result was, that Dicky had been living in the seventh heaven, had bought himself a tin sword, and wore it strapped to his waist, dangling down beneath his jacket. Dicky, wild to be a soldier, worshipped Captain Collinson as the prince of heroes, and followed him about like a shadow. An inkling of

this ambition of Dicky's, and of Captain Collinson's promise, had only reached Mrs. Knox's ears this very afternoon. It was a ridiculous promise of course, worth nothing, but Mrs. Knox took it up seriously.

"A commission for Dicky!—get Dicky a commission!" she exclaimed in a flutter that set her bracelets jangling, just as I arrived on the scene. "Why, what can you mean, Captain Collinson? Do you think I would have Dicky made into a soldier—to be shot at? Never. He is my only son. How can you put such ideas into his head?"

"Don't mind her," cried Dicky, shaking the captain's coat-tails. "I say, captain, don't you mind her."

Captain Collinson turned to young Dicky, and gave him a reassuring wink. Upon which, Dicky went strutting over the grass-plat, brandishing his sword. I shook hands with Mrs. Knox and the girls, and, turning to salute the captain, found him gone.

"You have frightened him away, Johnny Ludlow," cried Charlotte: but she spoke in jest.

"He was already going," said Mina. "He told me he had an engagement."

"And a good thing too," spoke Mrs. Knox, crossly. "Fancy his imparting dangerous notions to Dicky!"

Dicky had just discovered our loss. He came shrieking back to know where the captain was. Gone away for good, his mother told him. Upon which

young Dicky plunged into a fit of passion and kicking.

"Do you know how Lady Jenkins is to-day?" I asked of Charlotte, when Dicky's noise had been appeased by a promise of cold apple-pudding for tea.

"Not so well."

"Not so well! I had thought of her as being much better."

"I don't think her so," continued Charlotte. "Madame St. Vincent told Mina this morning that she was all right; but when I went in just now she was in bed and could hardly answer me."

"Is her cold worse?"

"No; I think that is gone, or nearly so. She seemed dazed—stupid, more so than usual."

"I certainly never saw anyone alter so greatly as Lady Jenkins has altered in the last few months," spoke Mrs. Knox. "She is not like the same woman."

"I'm sure I wish we had never gone that French journey!" said Mina. "She has never been well since.—Oh, here's Arnold!"

Dr. Knox had come straight into the garden from Jenkins House. Dicky rushed up to besiege his arms and legs; but, as Dicky was in a state of flour—which he had just put upon himself in the kitchen, or had had put upon him by the maids—the Doctor ordered him to keep at arm's length; and the Doctor was the only person who could make himself obeyed by Dicky.

"You have been to see Lady Jenkins, Arnold," said his step-mother. "How is she?"

"Nothing much to boast of," lightly answered Dr. Knox. "Johnny, are you ready?"

"I am going to be a soldier, Arnold," put in Dicky, dancing a kind of war-dance round him. "Captain Collinson is going to make me a captain like himself."

"All right," said Arnold. "You must grow a little bigger first."

"And, Arnold, the captain says—Oh, my!" broke off Dicky, "what's this? What have I found?"

The boy stooped to pick up something glittering that had caught his eye. It proved to be a curiously-shaped gold watch-key, with a small compass in it. Mina and Lotty both called out that it was Captain Collinson's and must have dropped from his chain during a recent romp with Dicky.

"I'll take it in to him at Lady Jenkins's," said Dicky.

"You will do nothing of the sort, sir," corrected his mother, taking the key from him: she had been thoroughly put out by the suggestion of the "commission."

"Should you chance to see the captain when you go out," she added to me, "tell him his watch-key is here."

The phaeton waited outside. It was the oldest

thing I ever saw in regard to fashion, and might have been in the firm hundreds of years. Its hood could be screwed up and down at will, just as the perch behind, where Thomas, the groom, generally sat, could be closed or opened. I asked Dr. Knox whether it had been built later than the year One.

"Just a little, I suppose," he answered, smiling. "This vehicle was Dockett's special aversion. He christened it the 'conveyance,' and we have mostly called it so since."

We were about to step into it, when Madame St. Vincent came tripping out of the gate up above. Dr. Knox met her.

"I was sorry not to have been in the way when you left, doctor," she said to him in a tone of apology: "I had gone to get the jelly for Lady Jenkins. Do tell me what you think of her?"

"She does not appear very lively," he answered; "but I can't find out that she is in any pain."

"I wish she would get better!—she does give me so much concern," warmly spoke Madame. "Not that I think her seriously ill, myself. I'm sure I do everything for her that I possibly can."

"Yes, yes, my dear lady, you cannot do more than you do," replied Arnold. "I will be up in better time to-morrow."

"Is Captain Collinson here?" I stayed behind Dr. Knox to ask.

"Captain Collinson here!" returned Madame St. Vincent, in a tart tone, as if the question offended her. "No, he is not. What should bring Captain Collinson here?"

"I thought he might have called in upon leaving Mrs. Knox's. I only wished to tell him that he dropped his watch-key next door. It was found on the grass."

"I don't know anything of his movements," coldly remarked Madame. And as I ran back to Dr. Knox, I remembered what Dan Jenkins had said—that she did not like the captain. And I felt Dan was right.

Dr. Knox drove home in silence, I sitting beside him, and Thomas in the perch. He looked very grave, like a man pre-occupied. In passing the railway-station, I made some remark about Miss Cattledon, who was coming by the train then on its way; but he did not appear to hear me.

Sam Jenkins ran out as we drew up at Mr. Tamlyn's gate. An urgent message had come for Dr. Knox: somebody taken ill at Cooper's—at the other end of the town.

"Mr. Tamlyn thinks you had better go straight on there at once, sir," said Sam.

"I suppose I must," replied the doctor. "It is awkward, though"—pulling out his watch. "Miss Cattledon will be due presently and Janet wanted me

to meet her," he added to me. "Would you do it, Johnny?"

"What—meet Miss Cattledon? Oh, yes, certainly."

The conveyance drove on, with the doctor and Thomas. I went in-doors with Sam. Janet said I could meet her aunt just as well as Arnold, as I knew her. The brougham was brought round to the gate by the coachman, Wall, and I went away in it.

Smoothly and quietly glided in the train, and out of a first-class carriage stepped Miss Cattledon, thin and prim and upright as ever.

"Dear me! is that you, Johnny Ludlow?" was her greeting to me when I stepped up and spoke to her; and her tone was all vinegar. "What do *you* do here?"

"I came to meet you. Did you not know I was staying at Lefford?"

"I knew *that*. But why should they send you to meet me?"

"Dr. Knox was coming himself, but he has just been called out to a patient. How much luggage have you, Miss Cattledon?"

"Never you mind how much, Johnny Ludlow: my luggage does not concern you."

"But cannot I save you the trouble of looking after it? If you will get into the brougham, I will see to the luggage and bring it on in a fly, if it's too much to go on the box with Wall."

"You mean well, Johnny Ludlow, I daresay; but I always see to my luggage myself. I should have lost it times and again, if I did not."

She went pushing about amid the porters and the trucks, and secured the luggage. One not very large black box went up by Wall; a smaller inside with us. So we drove out of the station in state, luggage and all, Cattledon holding her head bolt-upright.

"How is Janet, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"And those two children of hers—are they very troublesome?"

"Indeed, no; they are the best little things you ever saw. I wanted to bring the boy with me to meet you, but Janet would not let me."

"Um!" grunted Cattledon: "showed a little sense for once. What is that building?"

"That's the Town Hall. I thought you knew Lefford, Miss Cattledon?"

"One cannot be expected to retain the buildings of a town in one's head as if they were photographed there," returned she in a sharp tone of reproof. Which shut me up.

"And, pray, how does that young woman continue to conduct herself?" she asked presently.

"What young woman?" I said, believing she must be irreverently alluding to Janet.

"Lettice Lane."

Had she mentioned the name of some great Indian Begum I could not have been more surprised. *That* name brought back to memory all the old trouble connected with Miss Deveen's emeralds, their loss and their finding: which, take it for all in all, was nothing short of a romance. But why did she question *me* about Lettice Lane. I asked her why.

"I asked it to be answered, young man," was Cattledon's grim retort.

"Yes, of course," I said with deprecation. "But how should I know anything about Lettice Lane?"

"If there's one thing I hate more than another, Johnny Ludlow, it is shuffling. I ask you how that young woman is going on; and I request you to answer me."

"Indeed, I would if I could. I don't understand why you should ask me. Is Lettice Lane not living still with you—with Miss Deveen?"

Cattledon evidently thought I *was* shuffling, for she looked daggers at me. "Lettice Lane," she said, "is with Janet Knox."

"With Janet Knox! Oh dear no, she is not."

"Don't you get into a habit of contradicting your elders, Johnny Ludlow. It is very unbecoming in a young man."

"But—see here, Miss Cattledon. If Lettice were living with Janet, I must have seen her. I see the

servants every day. I assure you Lettice is not one of them."

She began to see that I was in earnest, and condescended to explain in her stiff way. "Janet came to town last May to spend a week with us," she said. "Previous to that, Lettice Lane had been complaining of not feeling strong: I thought it was nothing but her restlessness; Miss Deveen and the doctor thought she wanted country air—that London did not agree with her. Janet was parting with her nurse at the time; she engaged Lettice to replace her, and brought her down to Lefford. Is the matter clear to you now, young man?"

"Quite so. But indeed, Miss Cattledon, Lettice is not with Janet now. The nurse is named Harriet, and she is not in the least like Lettice Lane."

"Then Lettice Lane must have gone roving again —unless you are mistaken," said Cattledon severely. "Wanting country air, forsooth! Change was what *she* wanted."

Handing Miss Cattledon over to the care of Janet, when we arrived, who took her upstairs, and told me tea would be ready soon, I went into Mr. Tamlyn's sitting-room. He was in the easy chair before the fire, dozing, but opened his eyes at my entrance.

"Visitor come all right, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir; she is gone to take her cloaks off. Janet says the tea is nearly ready."

"I am quite ready for it," he remarked, and shut his eyes again.

I took up a book I was reading, "Martin Chuzzlewit," and sat down on the broad window-seat, legs up, to catch the now fading light. The folds of the crimson curtain lay between me and Mr. Tamlyn—and I only hoped Mrs. Gamp would not send me into convulsions and disturb him.

But she went well-nigh to do it. Looking out of the hotel window and congratulating herself that there was a "parapege" to drop on in case of fire, sent me off. My hands were on my mouth and my shoulders silently shaking, when Dr. Knox came in. He went up to the fire, and stood at the corner of the mantelpiece, his elbow on it, his back to me; and old Tamlyn woke up.

"Well," began he, "what was the matter at Cooper's, Arnold?"

"Eldest boy fell off a ladder and broke his arm. It is only a simple fracture."

"Been very busy to day, Arnold?"

"Pretty well."

"Hope I shall be out again in a day or two. How did you find Lady Jenkins?"

"Not at all to my satisfaction. She was in bed, and—and in fact seemed hardly to know me."

Tamlyn said nothing to this, and a silence ensued. Dr. Knox broke it. He turned his eyes from the fire

on which they had been fixed, and looked full at his partner.

"Has it ever struck you that there's not quite fair play going on up there?" he asked in a low tone.

"Up where?"

"With Lady Jenkins."

"How do you mean, Arnold?"

"That something is being given to her?"

Tamlyn sat upright in his chair, pushed his scanty hair back, and stared at Dr. Knox.

"*What* do you mean, Knox? What do you suspect?"

"That she is being habitually drugged; gradually, slowly——"

"Merciful goodness!" interrupted Tamlyn, rising to his feet in excitement. "Do you mean slowly poisoned?"

"Hush!—I hear Janet," cried Dr. Knox.

AN UGLY DOUBT.

I.

You might have heard a pin drop in the room. They were listening to the footsteps outside the door, but the footsteps did not make the hush and the nameless horror that pervaded it: the words spoken by Dr. Knox had done that. Old Tamlyn stood, a picture of dismay. For myself, sitting in the window-seat, my feet comfortably stretched out before me, and partially sheltered by the red curtains, I could only gaze at them both.

Janet's footsteps died away. She appeared to have been crossing the hall to the tea-room. And they began to talk again.

"I do not say that Lady Jenkins is being poisoned; absolutely, deliberately poisoned," said Dr. Knox, in the hushed tone to which his voice had dropped; "I do not yet go quite so far as that. But I do think that she is in some way being tampered with."

"In what way?" gasped Tamlyn.

"Drugged."

The Doctor's countenance wore a puzzled expression as he spoke; his eyes a far-away look, just as

though he did not see his own theory clearly. Mr. Tamlyn's face changed: the astonishment, the alarm, the dismay depicted on it gave place suddenly to relief.

"It cannot be, Arnold. Rely upon it you are mistaken. Who would harm her?"

"Nobody that I know of; no suspicious person is about her to do it," replied Dr. Knox. "And there lies the puzzle. I suppose she does not take anything herself? Opium, say?"

"Good heavens, no," warmly spoke old Tamlyn. "No woman living is less likely to do that than Lady Jenkins."

"Less likely than she *was*. But you know yourself how unaccountably she has changed."

"She does not take opium or any other drug. I could stake my word upon it, Arnold."

"Then it is being given to her—at least, I think so. If not, her state is to me inexplicable. Mind you, Mr. Tamlyn, not a breath of this must transpire beyond our two selves," urged Dr. Knox, his tone and his gaze at his senior partner alike impressively earnest. "If anything is wrong, it is being wilfully and covertly enacted; and our only chance of tracing it home is to conceal our suspicion of it."

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Knox," I interrupted at this juncture, the notion, suddenly flashing into my

mind, that he was unaware of my presence, sending me hot all over; "did you know I was here?"

They both turned to me, and Dr. Knox's confused start was a sufficient answer.

"You heard all I said, Johnny Ludlow?" spoke Dr. Knox.

"All. I am very sorry."

"Well, it cannot be helped now. You will not let it transpire?"

"That I certainly will not."

"We shall have to take you into our confidence—to include you in the plot," said Arnold Knox, with a smile. "I believe we might have a less trustworthy adherent."

"You could not have one more true."

"Right, Johnny," added Mr. Tamlyn. "But I do hope Dr. Knox is mistaken. I think you must be, Arnold. What are your grounds for this new theory?"

"I don't tell you that it is quite new," replied Dr. Knox. "A faint idea of it has been floating in my mind for some little time. As to grounds, I have no more to go upon than you have had. Lady Jenkins is in a state that we do not understand; neither you nor I can fathom what is amiss with her: and I need not point out that such a condition of things is unsatisfactory to a medical man, and sets him thinking."

"I am sure I have not been able to tell what it is

that ails her," concurred old Tamlyn, in a helpless kind of tone. "She seems always to be in a lethargy, more or less; to possess no proper self-will; to have parted, so to say, with all her interest in life."

"Just so. And I cannot discover, and do not believe, that she is in any condition of health to cause this. *I believe that the evil is being daily induced*," emphatically continued Dr. Knox. "And if she does not herself induce it, by taking improper things, they are being administered to her by others. You will not admit the first theory, Mr. Tamlyn?"

"No, that I will not. Lady Jenkins no more takes pernicious drugs of her own accord than I take them."

"Then the other theory must come up. It draws the point to a narrow compass, but to a more startling one."

"Look here, Arnold. If I did admit the first theory, you'd be no nearer the light. Lady Jenkins could not obtain drugs, and be perpetually swallowing them, without detection. Madame St. Vincent would have found her out in a day."

"Yes."

"And would have stopped it at once herself, or handed it over to me to be dealt with. She is truly anxious for Lady Jenkins, and spares no pains, no time, no trouble for her."

"I believe that," said Dr. Knox. "Whatsoever

is being done, Madame St. Vincent is kept in the dark—just as much as we are. Who else is about her?"

"Nobody much but her maid, that I know of," replied old Tamlyn, after a pause of consideration. "And I should think she was as free from suspicion as Madame herself. It seems a strange thing."

"It is. But I fear I am right. The question now will be, how we are to set about solving the mystery?"

"She is not quite always in a lethargic state," observed Tamlyn, his thoughts going off at a tangent.

"She is so more or less," dissented Dr. Knox. "Yesterday morning I was there at eight o'clock; I went early purposely, and she was in a more stupidly lethargic state than I had before seen her. Which of course proves one thing."

"What thing? I fail to catch your meaning, Arnold."

"That she is being drugged in the night as well as the day."

"If she is drugged at all," corrected Mr. Tamlyn, shaking his head. "But I do not give in to your fancy yet, Arnold. All this must edify you, Johnny!"

Tamlyn spoke the words in a jesting sense, meaning of course that it had done nothing of the kind. He was wrong, if to edify means to interest. Hardly ever during my life had I been more excited.

"It is a frightful shame if anybody is playing with Lady Jenkins," I said to them. "She is as good-hearted an old lady as I ever saw. And why should they do it? Where's the motive—the object?"

"There lies one of the difficulties—the motive," observed Dr. Knox. "I cannot see any; any end to be obtained by it. No living being that I know of can have an interest in wishing for Lady Jenkins' death or illness."

"How is her money left?"

"A pertinent question, Johnny. I do not expect anybody could answer it, save herself and Belford, the lawyer. I *suppose* her relatives, all the nephews and nieces, will inherit it: and they are not about her, you see, and cannot be dosing her. No; the motive is to me a complete mystery. Meanwhile, Johnny, keep your ears and eyes open when you are up there; there's no telling what chance word or look may be dropped that might serve to give you a clue: and keep your mouth shut."

I laughed.

"If I could put aside my patients for a week, and invent some excuse for taking up my abode at Jenkins House, I know I should soon find out all there is to find," went on Dr. Knox.

"Arnold, why not take Madame St. Vincent into your confidence?"

Dr. Knox turned quickly round at the words to

face his senior partner. He held up his finger warningly.

"Things are not ripe for it," he said. "Let me get, or try to get, a little more inkling into matters than I have at present, as touching the domestic economy at Jenkins House. I may have to do as you say, later: but women are only chattering magpies; marplots, often with the best intentions; and Madame St. Vincent may be no exception."

"Will you please come to tea?" interrupted Janet, opening the door.

Miss Cattledon, in a sea-green silk gown that I'm sure I had seen many times before, and the velvet on her thin throat, and a bow of lace on her head, shook hands with Mr. Tamlyn and Dr. Knox, and we sat down to tea. Little Arnold, standing by his mother in his plaid frock and white drawers (for the time to dress little children as men had not come in then by many a year), had a piece of bread and butter given to him. While he was eating it the nurse appeared.

"Are you ready, Master Arnold? It is quite bedtime."

"Yes, he is ready, Harriet; and he has been very good," spoke Janet. And the little fellow went contentedly off without a word.

Miss Cattledon, stirring her tea at the moment, put the spoon down to look at the nurse, staring at her as if she had never seen a nurse before.

"That's not Lettice Lane," she observed sententiously, as the door closed on Harriet. "Where is Lettice Lane?"

"She has left, Aunt Jemima."

If a look could have withered Janet, Cattledon's was severe enough to do it. But the displeasure was meant for Lettice, not for Janet.

"What business had she to leave? Did she misbehave herself?"

"She stayed with me only two months," said Janet. "And she left because she still continued poorly, and the two children were rather too much for her. The baby was cutting her teeth, which disturbed Lettice at night; and I and Arnold both thought we ought to have someone stronger."

"Did you give her warning?" asked Cattledon, who was looking her very grimmest at the absent Lettice; "or did she give it you?"

Janet laughed presently. "I think it was a kind of mutual warning, Aunt Jemima. Lettice acknowledged to me that she was hardly equal to the care of the children; and I told her I thought she was not. We found her another place."

"A rolling stone gathers no moss," commented Cattledon. "Lettice Lane changes her place too often."

"She stayed a good while with Miss Deveen, Aunt Jemima. And she likes her present place. She gets

very good wages, better than she had with me, and helps to keep her mother."

"What may her duties be? Is she housemaid again?"

"She is lady's maid to Lady Jenkins, an old lady who lives up the London Road. Lettice has grown much stronger since she went there. Why, what do you think, Aunt Jemima?" added Janet, laughing, "Lettice has actually been to Paris. Lady Jenkins went there just after engaging Lettice, and took her."

Miss Cattledon tossed her head. "Much good that would do Lettice Lane! Only fill her up with worse conceits than ever. I wonder she is not yet off to Australia! She used always to be talking of it."

"You don't appear to like Lettice Lane, ma'am," smiled old Tamlyn.

"No, I do *not*, sir. Lettice Lane first became known to me under unfavourable circumstances, and I have not liked her since."

"Indeed! What were they?"

"Some of Miss Deveen's jewels disappeared—were stolen; and Lettice Lane was suspected. It turned out later that she was not guilty; but I could not get over my dislike to her. We cannot help our likes and dislikes, which often come to us without rhyme or reason," acknowledged Miss Cattledon, "and I admit that I am perhaps too persistent in mine."

Not a soul present, myself excepted, had ever

heard about the loss of the emeralds: and somehow I felt sorry that Cattledon had spoken of it. Not that she did it in ill-nature—I give her that due. Questions were immediately poured out, and she had to give the full history.

The story interested them all, Dr. Knox especially. Just as Cattledon had put down her spoon to stare at Harriet, so he, absorbed in the recital, forgot his plate and cup, to stare at Miss Cattledon.

"And who did take the jewels?" he asked.

But Cattledon could not enlighten him, for Miss Deveen had not betrayed Sophie Chalk, even to her.

"I don't know who it was," tartly confessed Cattledon, the point being a sore one with her. "Miss Deveen promised, I believe, to screen the thief; and did so."

"Perhaps it was really Lettice Lane?"

"I believe not. I am sure not. It was a lady: Miss Deveen told me that much. No; of that disgraceful act Lettice Lane was innocent: but I should never be surprised to hear of her falling into trouble. She is capable of it."

"Of poisoning somebody, perhaps?" spoke Dr. Knox.

"Yes," acquiesced Cattledon grimly.

How prejudiced she was against Lettice Lane!

But she had given this last answer only in the same jesting spirit in which it appeared to have been put, not really meaning it.

"To be wrongly suspected, as poor Lettice Lane was, ought to make people all the more considerate to her," remarked Janet, her thoughts no doubt reverting to the time when she herself was falsely suspected—and accused.

"True, my dear," answered old Tamlyn. "Poor Lettice must have had her troubles."

"And she has had her faults," retorted Cattledon.

But this story had made an impression on Dr. Knox that Cattledon never suspected, never intended. He took up the notion that Lettice Lane was guilty. Going into Mr. Tamlyn's sitting-room for "Martin Chuzzlewit" when tea was over, I found his hand on my shoulder. He had silently followed me.

"Johnny Ludlow," he said, looking down into my eyes in the dim room, which was only lighted by the dim fire, "I don't like this that I have heard of Lettice Lane."

And the next to come in was Tamlyn. Closing the door, he walked up to the hearth-rug where we stood, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

"I am telling Johnny Ludlow that this story of Miss Deveen's emeralds has made an unfavourable impression on me," quoth Dr. Knox to him. "It does not appear to me to be at all clear that Lettice Lane

did not take them; and that Miss Deveen, in her benevolence, screened her from the consequences."

"But, indeed ——" I was beginning, when Dr. Knox stopped me.

"A moment, Johnny. I was about to add that a woman who is capable of one crime can sometimes be capable of another; and I should not be surprised if it is Lettice Lane who is tampering with Lady Jenkins."

"But indeed," I repeated, "Lettice Lane did *not* take the jewels. She knew nothing about it. She was perfectly innocent."

"You cannot answer for it, Johnny."

"Yes, I can; and do. I know who did take them."

"*You* know, Johnny Ludlow?" cried old Tamlyn, while Dr. Knox looked at me in silence.

"I helped Miss Deveen to find it out. At least, she had me with her during the progress of the discovery. It was a lady who took the jewels—as Miss Cattledon told you. She fainted away when it was brought home to her, and fell on my shoulder."

I believe they hardly knew whether to give me credit or not. Of course it did sound strange that I, young Johnny Ludlow, should have been entrusted by Miss Deveen with a secret she would not disclose even to her many years' companion and friend, Jemima Cattledon.

"Who was it then, Johnny?" began Mr. Tamlyn.

"I should not like to tell, sir. I do not think it would be right to tell. For the young lady's own sake Miss Deveen hushed the matter up, hoping it would be a warning to her in future. And I daresay it has been."

"Young, was she?"

"Yes. She has married since then. I could not, in honour, tell you her name."

"Well, I suppose we must believe you, Johnny," said Dr. Knox, making the admission unwillingly. "Lettice Lane did get fingering the jewels, it appears; you admit that."

"But she did not take them. It was—another." And, cautiously choosing my words, so as not to say anything that could direct suspicion to Sophie Chalk —whose name most likely they had never heard in their lives—I gave them an outline of the way in which Miss Deveen had traced the matter out. The blaze lighted up Mr. Tamlyn's grey face as I told it.

"You perceive that it could not have been Lettice Lane, Dr. Knox," I said, in conclusion. "I am sorry Miss Cattledon should have spoken against her."

"Yes, I perceive Lettice could not have been guilty of stealing the jewels," answered Dr. Knox. "Nevertheless, a somewhat unfavourable impression of the girl has been made upon me, and I shall look a little

after her. "Why does she want to emigrate to Australia?"

"Only because two of her brothers are there. I daresay it is all idle talk—that she will never go."

They said no more to me. I took up my book and quitted the room, leaving them to talk it out between themselves.

II.

Mr. Tamlyn might be skilful in medicine; he certainly was not in diplomacy. Dr. Knox had particularly impressed upon him the desirability of keeping their suspicion a secret for the present, even from Madame St. Vincent; yet the first use old Tamlyn made of his liberty was to disclose it to her.

Tossed here, tossed there, in the conflict of doubts and suspicions that kept arising in his mind, Mr. Tamlyn, from the night I have just told you of, was more uneasy than a fish out of water, his opinion perpetually vacillating. "You must be mistaken, Arnold; I feel sure there's nothing wrong going on," he would say to his junior partner one minute; and, the next minute, decide that it *was* going on, and that its perpetrator must be Lettice Lane.

The uneasiness took him abroad earlier than he would otherwise have gone. A slight access of fever attacked him the day after the subject had been broached—which fever he had no doubt worried himself into. In the ordinary course of things he would have stayed at home for a week after that: but he now went out on the third day.

"I will walk," he decided, looking up at the sunshine. "It will do me good. What lovely weather we are having."

Betaking himself through the streets to the London Road, he reached Jenkins House. The door stood open; and the doctor, almost as much at home in the house as Lady Jenkins herself, walked in without knocking.

The dining-room, where they mostly sat in the morning, was empty; the drawing-room was empty; and Mr. Tamlyn went on to a third room, that opened to the garden at the back with glass doors.

"Anybody here? or is the house gone a-maying?" cried the surgeon as he entered and came suddenly upon a group of three people, all upon their knees before a pile of old music—Mme. St. Vincent, Mina Knox and Captain Collinson. Two of them got up, laughing. Mina remained where she was.

"We are searching for a manuscript song that is missing," explained Madame, as she gave her hand to the doctor. "Mina feels sure she left it here; but I do not remember to have seen it."

"It was not mine," added Mina, looking round at the doctor in her pretty, gentle way. "Caroline Parker lent it to me, and has sent for it twice."

"I hope you'll find it, my dear."

"I must have left it here," continued Mina, as she rapidly turned over the sheets. "I was singing it

yesterday afternoon, you remember," she added, glancing up at the captain. "It was while you were up stairs with Lady Jenkins, Madame St. Vincent."

She came to the end of the pile of music, but could not find the song. Putting it in a stack on a side table, Mina said a general good-bye, escaped by the glass doors, and ran home by the little gate that divided the two gardens.

Captain Collinson left next. Perhaps he and Mina had both a sense of being de trop when the doctor was there. Waiting to exchange a few words with Mr. Tamlyn, and bidding Mme. St. Vincent an adieu that had more of formality in it than friendship, the captain bowed himself out, taking his tasselled cane with him, Madame ringing for one of the men servants to attend him to the hall door. Tasselled canes were the mode then.

"They do not make a practice of meeting here, do they?" began old Tamlyn, when the captain was beyond hearing.

"Who? What?" asked Mme. St. Vincent.

"The captain and little Mina Knox."

For a minute or two it appeared that Madame could not catch his meaning. She looked at him in perplexity.

"I fail to understand you, dear Mr. Tamlyn."

"The captain is a very attractive man, no doubt; a good match, I daresay, and all that: but still we

should not like poor little Mina to be whisked off to India by him. I asked if they often met here."

"Whisked off to India?" repeated Madame, in astonishment. "Little Mina? By him? In what capacity?"

"As his wife."

"But—dear me!—what can have put you upon such a notion, my good sir? Mina is a mere child."

"Old enough to get foolish notions into her head," quoth the doctor quaintly; "especially if they are put into it by a bewhiskered grenadier, such as he. I hope he is not doing it! I hope you do not give them opportunities of meeting here!"

Madame seemed quite taken aback at the implication. Her voice had a sound of tears in it.

"Do you suppose I could be capable of such a thing, sir? I did think you had a better opinion of me. Such a child as Mina! We were both on our knees, looking for the song, when Captain Collinson came in; and he must needs go down on his great stupid knees too. He but called to enquire after Lady Jenkins."

"Very thoughtful of him, of course. He is often up here, I fancy; at the next house, if not at this."

"Certainly not often at this. He calls on Lady Jenkins occasionally, and she likes it. *I* don't encourage him. He may be a brave soldier, and a man

of wealth and of family, and everything else that's desirable; but he is no especial favourite of mine."

"Well, Sam Jenkins has a notion that he would like to get making love to Mina. Sam was laughing about it in the surgery last night with Johnny Ludlow, and I happened to overhear him. Sam thinks they meet here, as well as next door: and you heard Mina say but now that she was singing to him here yesterday afternoon. Stay, my dear lady, don't be put out. I am sure *you* have thought it no harm, have been innocent of all suspicion of it. Mistaken, you tell me? Well, it may be I am. Mina is but a child, as you observe, and—and perhaps Sam was only jesting. How is our patient to-day?"

"Pretty well. Just a little drowsy."

"In bed, or up?"

"Oh, up."

"Will you tell her I am here?"

Madame St. Vincent, her plumage somewhat ruffled, betook herself to the floor above, Mr. Tamlyn following. Lady Jenkins, in a loose gown of blue quilted silk and cap with yellow roses in it, sat at the window, nodding.

"Well," said he, sitting down by her and taking her hand, "and how do you feel to-day?"

She opened her eyes and smiled at him. Better, she thought: oh yes, certainly better.

"You are sleepy."

"Rather so. Getting up tired me."

"Are you not going for a drive to-day? It would do you good."

"I don't know. Ask Patty. Patty, are we going out to-day?"

The utter helplessness of mind and body which appeared to be upon her as she thus appealed to another, Mr. Tamlyn had rarely seen equalled. Even while listening to Mme. St. Vincent's answer—that they would go if she felt strong enough—her heavy eyelids closed again. In a minute or two she was in a sound sleep. Tamlyn threw caution and Dr. Knox's injunction to the winds, and spoke on the moment's impulse to Mme. St. Vincent.

"You see," he observed, pointing to the sleeping face.

"She is only dozing off again."

"*Only!* My dear, good lady, this perpetual, stupid, lethargic sleepiness is not natural. You are young, perhaps inexperienced, or you would know it to be not so."

"I scarcely think it altogether unnatural," softly dissented Madame, with deprecation. "She has really been very poorly."

"But not sufficiently so to induce this helplessness. It has been upon her for months, and is gaining ground."

"She is seventy years of age, remember."

"I know that. But people far older than that are not as she is without some cause: either of natural illness, or—or—something else. Step here a minute, my dear."

Old Tamlyn walked rapidly to the other window, and stood there talking in a low tone, his eyes fixed on Mme. St. Vincent, his hand, in his eagerness, touching her shoulder.

"Knox thinks, and has imparted his opinion to me —ay, and his doubts also—that something is being given to her."

"That something is being given to her!" echoed Mme. St. Vincent, her face flushing with surprise. "Given to her in what way?"

"Or else that she is herself taking it. But I, who have known her longer than Knox has, feel certain that she is not one to do anything of the kind. Besides, you would have found it out long ago."

"I protest I do not understand you," spoke Madame, earnestly. "What is it that she *could* take? She has taken the medicine that comes from your surgery. She has taken nothing else."

"Knox thinks she is being drugged."

"Drugged! Lady Jenkins drugged? How, drugged? What with? What for? Who would drug her?"

"There it is; who would do it?" said the old doctor, interrupting the torrent of words poured forth in surprise. "I confess I think the symptoms point to it.

But I don't see how it could be accomplished and you not detect it, considering that you are so much with her."

"Why, I hardly ever leave her, day or night," cried Madame. "My bedroom, as you know, is next to hers, and I sleep with the intervening door open. There is no more chance, sir, that she could be drugged than that I could be."

"When Knox first spoke of it to me I was pretty nearly scared out of my senses," went on Tamlyn. "For I caught up a worse notion than he meant to convey—that she was being systematically poisoned."

A dark, vivid, resentful crimson dyed Madame's face. The suggestion seemed to be a reproof on her vigilance.

"Poisoned!" she repeated in angry indignation. "How dare Dr. Knox suggest such a thing?"

"My dear, he did not suggest it against *you*. He and I both look upon you as her best safeguard. It is your being with her, that gives us some sort of security: and it is your watchfulness we shall have to look to for detection."

"Poisoned!" reiterated Madame, unable to get over the ugly word. "I think Dr. Knox ought to be made to answer for so wicked a suspicion."

"Knox did not mean to go so far as that: it was my misapprehension. But he feels perfectly convinced that she is being tampered with. In short, drugged."

"It is not possible," reasoned Madame. "It could not be done without my knowledge. Indeed, sir, you may dismiss all idea of the kind from your mind; you and Dr. Knox also. I do assure you that such a thing would be simply impracticable."

Mr. Tamlyn shook his head. "Any one who sets to work to commit a crime by degrees, usually possesses a large share of innate cunning—more than enough to deceive lookers-on," he remarked. "I can understand how thoroughly repulsive this idea is to you, my good lady; that your mind shrinks from admitting it; but I wish you would, just for argument's sake, allow its possibility."

But Madame was harder than adamant. Old Tamlyn saw what it was—that she took this accusation, and would take it, to be a reflection on her care.

"Who is there, amidst us all, that would attempt to injure Lady Jenkins?" she asked. "The household consists only of myself and the servants. *They* would not seek to harm their mistress."

"Not so sure; not so sure. It is amidst those servants that we must look for the culprit. Dr. Knox thinks so, and so do I."

Madame's face of astonishment was too genuine to be doubted. She feebly lifted her hands in disbelief. To suspect the servants seemed, to her, as ridiculous as the suspicion itself.

"Her maid, Lettice, and the housemaid, Sarah, are

the only two servants who approach her when she is ill: Sarah but very little. Both of them are kind-hearted young women."

Mr. Tamlyn coughed. Whether he would have gone on to impart his doubt of Lettice cannot be known. During the slight silence Lettice herself entered the room with her mistress's medicine. A quick, dark-eyed young woman, in a light print gown.

The stir aroused Lady Jenkins. Madame St. Vincent measured out the physic, and was handing it to the patient, when Mr. Tamlyn seized upon the wine glass.

"It's all right," he observed, after smelling and tasting, speaking apparently to himself: and Lady Jenkins drank it up.

"That is the young woman you must especially watch," whispered Mr. Tamlyn, as Lettice retired with her waiter.

"What! Lettice?" exclaimed Madame, opening her eyes.

"Yes; I should advise you to do so. She is the only one who is much about her mistress," he added, as if he would account for the advice. "*Watch her.*"

Leaving Madame at the window to digest the mandate and to get over her astonishment, he sat down by Lady Jenkins again, and began talking of this and that: the fineness of the weather, the gossip passing in the town.

"What do you take?" he asked abruptly.

"Take?" she repeated. "What is it that I take, Patty?" appealing to her companion.

"Nay, but I want you to tell me yourself," hastily interposed the doctor. "Don't trouble Madame."

"But I don't know that I can recollect."

"Oh, yes, you can. The effort to do so will do you good—wake you out of this stupid sleepiness. Take yesterday: what did you have for your breakfast?"

"Yesterday? Well, I think they brought me a poached egg."

"And a very nice thing, too. What did you drink with it?"

"Tea. I always take tea."

"Who makes it?"

"I do," said Madame, turning her head to Mr. Tamlyn with a meaning smile. "I take my own tea from the same tea-pot."

"Good. What did you take after that, Lady Jenkins?"

"I daresay I had some beef-tea at eleven. Did I, Patty? I generally do have it."

"Yes, dear Lady Jenkins; and delicious beef-tea it is, and it does you good. I should like Mr. Tamlyn to take a cup of it."

"I don't mind if I do."

"Perhaps the answer was unexpected: but Madame

St. Vincent rang the bell and ordered up a cup of the beef-tea. The beef-tea proved to be "all right," as he observed by the medicine. Meanwhile he had continued his questions to his patient.

She had eaten some chicken for dinner, and a bit of sweetbread for supper. There had been interludes of refreshment: an egg beaten up with milk, a cup of tea and bread-and-butter, and such like.

"You don't starve her," laughed Mr. Tamlyn.

"No, indeed," warmly replied Madame. "I do what I can to nourish her."

"What do you take to drink?" continued the doctor.

"Nothing to speak of," interposed Madame. "A drop of cold brandy-and-water with her dinner."

"Patty thinks it is better for me than wine," put in Lady Jenkins.

"I don't know but it is. You don't take too much of it?"

Lady Jenkins paused. "Patty knows. Do I take too much, Patty?"

Patty was smiling, amused at the very idea. "I measure one table-spoonful of brandy into a tumbler and put three or four table-spoonfuls of water to it. If you think that is too much brandy, Mr. Tamlyn, I will put less."

"Oh, nonsense," said old Tamlyn. "It's hardly enough."

"She has the same with her supper," concluded Madame.

Well, old Tamlyn could make nothing of his suspicions. And he came home from Jenkins House and told Knox he thought they must be both mistaken.

"Why did you speak of it to Madame?" asked Dr. Knox. "We agreed to be silent for a short while."

"I don't see why she should not be told, Arnold. She is straightforward as the day—and Lettice Lane seems so, too. I tasted the beef-tea they gave her—took a cup of it, in fact—and I tasted the physic. Madame says it is impossible that anything in the shape of drugs is being given to her; and upon my word I think so too."

"All the same, I wish you had not spoken."

And a little time went on.

III.

THE soirée to-night was at Rose Villa: and Mrs. Knox, attired in a striped gauze dress and the jangling ornaments she favoured, stood to receive her guests. Beads on her thin brown neck, beads on her sharp brown wrists, beads in her ears, and beads dropping from her waist. She looked all beads. They were drab beads to-night, each resting in a little cup of gold. Janet and Miss Cattledon went up in the brougham, the latter more stiffly ungracious than usual, for she still resented Mrs. Knox's former behaviour to Janet. I walked.

"Where can the people from next door be?" wondered Mrs. Knox, as the time went on and Lady Jenkins did not appear.

For Lady Jenkins went abroad again. In a day or two after Mr. Tamlyn's interview with her, Lefford had the pleasure of seeing her red-wheeled carriage whirling about the streets, herself and her companion inside it. Old Tamlyn said she was getting strong. Dr. Knox said nothing; but he kept his eyes open.

"I *hope* she is not taken ill again! I hope she is not too drowsy to come!" reiterated Mrs. Knox.

"Sometimes Madame can't rouse her up from these sleepy fits, do what she will."

Lady Jenkins was the great card of the soirée, and Mrs. Knox grew cross. Captain Collinson had not come either. She drew me aside.

"Johnny Ludlow, I wish you would step into the next door and see whether anything has happened. Do you mind it? So strange that Madame St. Vincent does not send, or come."

I did not mind it at all. I rather liked the expedition, and passed out of the noisy and crowded room to the lovely, warm night air. The sky was clear; the moon radiant.

I was no longer on ceremony at Jenkins House, having been up to it pretty often with Dan or Sam, and on my own score. Lady Jenkins had been pleased to take a fancy to me, had graciously invited me to some drives in her red-wheeled carriage, she dozing at my side pretty nearly all the time. I could not help being struck with the utter abnegation of will she displayed. It was next door to imbecility.

"Patty, Johnny Ludlow would like to go that way, I think, to-day: may we?" she would say. "Must we turn back already, Patty?—it has been such a short drive." Thus she deferred to Mme. St. Vincent in all things, small and great: if she had a will or choice of her own, it seemed that she never thought of exercising it. Day after day she would say the drives were

short: and very short indeed they were made, upon some plea or other, when I made a third in the carriage. "I am so afraid of fatigue for her," Madame whispered to me one day, when she seemed especially anxious.

"But you take a much longer drive, when she and you are alone," I answered, that fact having struck me. "What difference does my being in the carriage make?—are you afraid of fatigue for the horses as well?" At which suggestion Madame burst out laughing.

"When I am alone with her I take care not to talk," she explained; "but when three of us are here there's sure to be talking going on, and it cannot fail to weary her."

Of course that was Madame's opinion: but my impression was that, let us talk as much as we would, in a high key or a low one, that poor nodding woman neither heard nor heeded it.

"Don't you think you are fidgetty over it, Madame?"

"Well, perhaps I am," she answered. "I assure you, Lady Jenkins is an anxious charge to me."

Therefore, being quite at home now at Jenkins House (to return to the evening and the soirée I was telling of), I ran in the nearest way to do Mrs. Knox's behest. That was through the two back gardens, by the intervening little gate. I knocked at the glass

doors of what was called the garden room, in which shone a light behind the curtains, and went straight in. Sitting near each other, conversing with an eager look on their faces, and both got up for Mrs. Knox's soirée, were Captain Collinson and Madame St. Vincent.

"Mr. Ludlow!" she exclaimed. "How you startled me!"

"I beg your pardon for entering so abruptly. Mrs. Knox asked me to run in and see whether anything was the matter, and I came the shortest way. She has been expecting you for some time."

"Nothing is the matter," shortly replied Madame, who seemed more put out than the occasion called for: she thought me rude, I suppose. "Lady Jenkins is not ready; that is all. She may be half an hour yet."

"Half an hour!—I won't wait longer, then," said Captain Collinson, catching up his flat hat. "I do trust she has not taken another chill. Au revoir, Madame."

With a nod to me, he made his exit by the way I had entered. The same peculiarity struck me now that I had observed before: whenever I went into a place, be it Jenkins House or Rose Villa, the gallant captain immediately quitted it.

"Do I frighten Captain Collinson away?" I said to Madame on the spur of the moment.

"*You* frighten him! Why should you?"

"I don't know why. If he happens to be here when I come in, he gets up and goes away. Did you never notice it? It is the same at Mrs. Knox's. It was the same once at Mrs. Hampshire's."

Madame laughed. "Perhaps he is shy," said she, jestingly.

"A man who has travelled to India and back must have rubbed his shyness off, one would think. I wish I knew where I had met him before!—if I have met him. Every now and again his face seems to strike on a chord of my memory."

"It is a handsome face," remarked Madame.

"Pretty well. As much as can be seen of it for hair. He has enough hair for a Russian bear or a wild Indian."

"Have wild Indians a superabundance of hair?" asked she gravely.

I laughed. "Seriously speaking though, Mme. St. Vincent, I think I must have met him somewhere."

"Seriously speaking, I don't think that can be," she answered; and her jesting tone had become a serious one. "I believe he has passed nearly all his life in India."

"Just as you have passed yours in the South of France. And yet there is something in your face also familiar to me."

"I should say you must be just a little fanciful on the subject of likenesses. Some people are."

"I do not think so. If I am I did not know it. I——"

The inner door opened and Lady Jenkins appeared, becloaked and beshawled, with a great green hood over her head, and leaning on Lettice Lane. Madame got up and threw a mantle on her own shoulders.

"Dear Lady Jenkins, I was just coming to see for you. Captain Collinson called in to give you his arm, but he did not wait. And here's Mr. Johnny Ludlow, sent in by Mrs. Knox to see whether we are all dead."

"Ay," said Lady Jenkins, nodding to me as she sat down on the sofa: "but I'd like a cup of tea before we start."

"A cup of tea?"

"Ay; I'm thirsty. Let me have it, Patty."

She spoke the last words in an imploring tone, as if Patty were her mistress. Madame threw her mantle off again, untied the green hood of her lady, and sent Lettice to make some tea.

"You had better go back and tell Mrs. Knox we are coming, though I'm sure I don't know when it will be," she said aside to me.

I did as I was told; and had passed through the garden gate, when my eye fell upon Master Richard Knox. He was standing on the grass in the moonlight, near the clump of laurels, silently contorting his small form into cranks and angles, after the gleeful

manner of Punch in the show when he has been giving his wife a beating. Knowing that agreeable youth could not keep himself out of mischief if he tried, I made up to him.

"Hush—sh—sh!" breathed he, stopping the question on my lips.

"What's the sport, Dicky?"

"She's with him there, beyond the laurels; they are walking round," he whispered. "Oh my! such fun! I have been peeping at 'em. He has got his arm round her waist."

Sure enough, at that moment they came into view —Mina and Captain Collinson. Dicky drew back into the shade, as did I. And I, to my very great astonishment, trod upon somebody else's feet, who made, so to say, one of the laurels.

"It's only I," breathed Sam Jenkins. "I'm on the watch as well as Dicky. It looks like a case of two loviers, does it not?

The "loviers" were parting. Captain Collinson held her hand between both his to give her his final whisper. Then Mina tripped lightly over the grass and stole in at the glass doors of the garden parlour. While the Captain stalked round to the front entrance and boldly rang, making believe he had but then arrived.

"Oh my, *my!*" repeated the enraptured Dicky,

"won't I have the pull of her now! She'd better tell tales of me again!"

"Is it a case, think you?" asked Sam of me, as we slowly followed in the wake of Mina.

"It looks like it," I answered.

Janet was singing one of her charming songs, as we stole in at the glass doors: "Blow, blow, thou wintry wind:" just as she used to sing it in that house in the years gone by. Her voice had not lost its sweetness. Mina stood near the piano now, a thoughtful look upon her flushed face.

"Where did you and Dicky go just now, Sam?"

Sam turned short round at the query. Charlotte Knox, as she put it, had suspicion in her low tone.

"Where did I and Dicky go?" repeated Sam, rather taken aback. "I—I only stepped out for a stroll in the moonlight. I don't know anything about Dicky."

"I saw Dicky run out to the garden first, and you went next," persisted Charlotte, who was just as keen as steel. "Dick, what was there to see? I will give you two helpings of trifle at supper if you tell me."

For two helpings of trifle Dick would have sold his birthright. "Such fun!" he cried, beginning to jump. "She was out there with the captain, Lotty: he came to the window here and beckoned to her: I saw him. I dodged them round and round the laurels, and I am pretty nigh sure he kissed her."

"Who was?—who did?" But the indignant glow on Lotty's face proved that she scarcely needed to put the question.

"That nasty Mina. She took and told that it was me which eat up the big bowl of raspberry cream in the larder to-day; and mother went and believed her!"

Charlotte Knox, her brow knit, her head held aloft, walked away after giving us all a searching look apiece. "I, like Dicky, saw Collinson call her out, and I thought I might as well see what he wanted to be after," Sam whispered to me. "I did not see Dicky at all, though, until he came into the laurels with you."

"He is talking to her now," I said, directing Sam's attention to the captain.

"I wonder whether I ought to tell Dr. Knox?" resumed Sam. "What do you think, Johnny Ludlow? She is so young, and somehow I don't trust him. Dan doesn't, either."

"Dan told me he did not."

"Dan fancies he is after her money. It would be a temptation to some people,—seven thousand pounds. Yet he seems to have plenty of his own."

"If he did marry her he could not touch the money for three or four years to come."

"Oh couldn't he, though," answered Sam, taking me up. "He could touch it next day."

"I thought she did not come into it till she was of age, and that Dr. Knox was trustee."

"That's only in case she does not marry. If she marries it goes to her at once. Here comes Aunt Jenkins!"

The old lady, as spruce as you please, in a satin gown, was shaking hands with Mrs. Knox. But she looked half silly: and, may I never be believed again, if she did not fall a nodding directly she sat down.

"Do you hail from India? as the Americans phrase it," I suddenly asked of Captain Collinson, when chance pinned us together in a corner of the supper-room, and he could not extricate himself.

"Hail from India!" he repeated. "Was I born there, I conclude you mean?"

"Yes."

"Not exactly. I went there, a child, with my father and mother. And, except for a few years during my teens, when I was home for education, I have been in India ever since. Why do you ask?"

"For nothing in particular. I was telling Mme. St. Vincent this evening that it seemed to me I had seen you before; but I suppose it could not be. Shall you be going back soon?"

"I am not sure. Possibly in the autumn, when my leave will expire: not till next year if I can get my leave extended. I shall soon be quitting Lefford."

"Shall you?"

"Must do it. I have to make my bow at a levée; and I must be in town for other things as well. I should like to enjoy a little of the season there: it may be years before the opportunity falls to my lot again. Then I have some money to invest: I think of buying an estate. Oh, I have all sorts of business to attend to, once I am in London."

"Where's the use of buying an estate if you are to live in India?"

"I don't intend to live in India always," he answered, with a laugh. "I shall quit the service as soon as ever I can, and settle down comfortably in the old country. A home of my own will be of use to me then."

Now it was that very laugh of Captain Collinson's that seemed more familiar to me than all the rest of him. That I had heard it before, ay, and heard it often, I felt sure. At least, I should have felt sure but for its seeming impossibility.

"You are from Gloucestershire, I think I have heard," he observed to me.

"No; from Worcestershire."

"Worcestershire? That's a nice county, I believe. Are not the Malvern Hills situated in it?"

"Yes. They are eight miles from Worcester."

"I should like to see them. I must see them before I go back. And Worcester is famous for—what is it?—china?—yes, china. And for its cathedral, I

believe. I shall get a day or two there if I can. I can do Malvern at the same time."

"Captain Collinson, would you mind giving Lady Jenkins your arm?" cried Mrs. Knox at this juncture. "She is going home."

"There is no necessity for Captain Collinson to disturb himself: I can take good care of Lady Jenkins," hastily spoke Madame St. Vincent, in a tart tone, which the room could not mistake. Evidently she did not favour Captain Collinson.

But the captain had already pushed himself through the throng of people and taken the old lady in tow. The next minute I found myself close to Charlotte Knox, who was standing at the supper-table, eating cold salmon and bread-and-butter.

"Are you a wild bear, Johnny Ludlow?" she asked me privately, under cover of the surrounding clatter.

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Madame St. Vincent takes you for one."

I laughed. "Has she told you so?"

"She has not told me: I guess it is some secret," returned Charlotte, beginning upon the sandwiches. "I learnt it in a curious way."

A vein of seriousness ran through her half-mocking tone; seriousness lay in her keen and candid eyes, lifted to mine.

"Yes, it was rather curious, the way it came to

me: and perhaps on my part not altogether honourable. Early this morning, Johnny, before ten o'clock had struck, mamma made me go in and ask how Lady Jenkins was, and whether she would be able to come to-night. I ran in the nearest way, by the glass doors, boisterously of course—mamma is always going on at me for that—and the breeze the doors made as I threw them open blew a piece of paper off the table. I stooped to pick it up, and saw it was a letter just begun in Madame's handwriting."

"Well?"

"Well, my eyes fell on the few words written; but I declare that I read them heedlessly, not with any dishonourable intention; such a thought never entered my mind. 'Dear Sissy,' the letter began, 'You must not come yet, for Johnny Ludlow is here, of all people in the world; it would not do for you and him to meet.' That was all."

"I suppose Madame had been called away," continued Charlotte, after a pause. "I put the paper on the table and was going on into the passage when I found the room door locked: so I just came out again, ran round to the front door and went in that way. Now if you are not a bear, Johnny, why should you frighten people?"

I did not answer. She had set me thinking.

"Madame St. Vincent had invited a sister from France to come and stay with her: she does just as

she likes here, you know. It must be she who is not allowed to meet you. What is the mystery?"

"Who is talking about mystery?" exclaimed Caroline Parker; who, standing near, must have caught the word. "What *is* the mystery, Lotty?"

And Lotty, giving her some evasive reply, made an end of her sandwiches and turned to the lemon sponge.

MADAME.

I.

"If Aunt Jenkins were the shrewd woman she used to be, I'd lay the whole case before her, and have it out; but she is not," contended Dan Jenkins, tilting the tongs in his hand, as we sat round the dying embers of the surgery fire.

His brother Sam and I had walked home together from Mrs. Knox's soirée, and we overtook Dan in the town. Another soirée had been held in Lefford that night, which Dan had promised himself to before knowing Mrs. Knox would have one. We all three turned into the surgery. Dr. Knox was out with a patient, and Sam had to wait up for him. Sam had been telling his brother what we witnessed up at Rose Villa—the promenade round the laurels that Captain Collinson and Mina had stolen in the moonlight. As for me, though I heard what Sam said, and put in a confirming word here and there, I was thinking my own thoughts. In a small way, nothing had ever puzzled me much more than the letter Charlotte Knox had seen. Who was Madame St. Vincent? and who

was her sister, that I, Johnny Ludlow, might not meet her?

"You see," continued Dan, "one reason why I can't help suspecting the fellow, is this—that he does not address Mina openly. If he were honest and above board, he would go in for her before all the world. He'd not do it in secret."

"What do you suspect him of?" cried Sam.

"I don't know. I do suspect him—that he is somehow not on the square. It's not altogether about Mina; but I have no confidence in the man."

Sam laughed. "Of course you have not, Dan. You want to keep Mina for yourself."

Dan pitched his soft hat at Sam's head, and let fall the tongs with a clatter.

"Collinson seems to be all right," I put in. "He is going up to London to a levée, and he is going to buy an estate. At least, he told me so to-night in the supper-room."

"Oh, in one sense of the word the fellow is all right," acknowledged Dan. "He is what he pretends to be; he is in the army list; and, for all I know to the contrary, he may have enough gold to float an argosy of ships. What I ask is, why he should go sneaking after Mina *when he does not care for her*."

"That may be just a fallacy of ours, Dan," said his brother.

"No, it's not. Collinson is in love with Madame St. Vincent; not with Mina."

"Then why does he spoon after Mina?"

"That's just it—why?"

"Any way, I don't think Madame is in love with him, Dan. It was proposed that he should take aunt home to-night, and Madame was as tart as you please over it, letting all the room know that she did not want him."

"Put it down so," agreed Dan, stooping to pick up the tongs. "Say that he is not fond of Madame, but of Mina, and would like to make her his wife: why does he not go about it in a proper manner; court her openly, speak to her mother; instead of pursuing her covertly like a sneak?"

"It may be his way of courting."

"May it! It is anything but a right way. He is for ever seeking to meet her on the sly. I know it. He got her out in the garden to-night to a meeting, you say: you und Johnny Ludlow saw it."

"Dicky saw it too, and Charlotte got the truth out of him. There may be something in what you say, Dan."

"There's a great deal in what I say," contended Dan, his honest face ablaze with earnestness. "Look here. Here's an officer and a gentleman; a rich man, as we are given to believe, and we've no reason to doubt it. He seems to spend enough—Carter saw

him lose five pounds last night, betting at billiards. If he is in love with a young lady, there's nothing to hinder a man like that from going in for her openly——"

"Except her age," struck in Sam. "He may think they'll refuse Mina to him on that score."

"Stuff! — I wish you'd not interrupt me, Sam. Every day will help to remedy that—and he might undertake to wait a year or two. But I feel sure and certain he does not really care for Mina; I feel sure that, if he is seeking in this underhand way to get her promise to marry him, he has some ulterior motive. My own belief is he would like to kidnap her."

Sam laughed. "You mean, kidnap her money?"

"Well, I don't see what else it can be. The fellow may have outrun the constable, and need some ready money to put him straight. Rely upon this much, Sam—that his habits are as fast as they can well be. I have been learning a little about him lately."

Sam made no answer. He began to look grave.

"Not at all the sort of man who ought to marry Mina, or any other tender young girl. He'd break her heart in a twelvemonth."

Sam spoke up. "I said to Johnny Ludlow, just now, that it might be better to tell Dr. Knox. Perhaps——"

"What about?" interrupted the Doctor himself, pouncing in upon us, and catching the words as he opened the door. "What have you to tell Dr. Knox about, Sam? And why are all you young men sitting up here? You'd be better in bed."

An additional straw, you know, breaks the camel's back. Whether Sam would really have disclosed the matter to Dr. Knox, I can't say; the Doctor's presence and the Doctor's question decided it.

Sam spoke in a low tone, standing behind the drug-counter with the Doctor, who had gone round to look at some entry in what they called the day-book, and had lighted a gas-burner to do it by. Dr. Knox made no remark of any kind while he listened, his eyes fixed on the book: one might have thought he did not hear, but for his compressed lips.

"If she were not so young, sir—a child, as may be said—I should not have presumed to speak," concluded Sam. "I don't know whether I have done wrong or right."

"Right," emphatically pronounced the Doctor.

But the word had hardly left his lips when there occurred a startling interruption. The outer door of the surgery, the one he had come in by, was violently drummed at, and then burst open. Charlotte Knox, Miss Mack the governess, and Sally the maid—the same Sally who had been at Rose Villa when the

trouble occurred about Janet Carey, and the same Miss Mack who had replaced Janet—came flocking in.

"Dicky's lost, Arnold," exclaimed Charlotte.

"Dicky lost!" repeated Dr. Knox. "How can he be lost at this time of night?"

"He *is*. And we had nearly gone to bed without finding it out. The people had all left, and the doors were locked, when somebody—Gerty, I think—began to complain of Dicky——"

"It was I who spoke," interposed the governess; and though she was fat enough for two people she had the meekest little voice in the world, and allowed herself to be made a perfect tool of at Rose Villa. "Master Dicky did behave very ill at supper, eating rudely of everything, and——"

"Yes, yes," broke in Charlotte, "I remember now, Macky. You said Dicky ought to be restrained, and you wondered he was not sick; and then mamma called out, 'But where is Dicky?' 'Gone to bed to sleep off his supper,' we all told her: and she sent Sally up to see that he had put his candle out."

"And of course," interrupted Sally, thinking it was her turn to begin, "when I found the room empty, and saw by the moonlight that Master Dicky had not come to bed at all, I ran down to say so. And his mamma got angry, accusing us servants of having carelessly locked him out of doors. And he can't be found, sir —as Miss Lotty says."

"No, he cannot be found anywhere," added Lotty. "We have searched the house and the gardens, and been in to enquire at Lady Jenkins's; and he is *gone*. And mamma is frantic, and said we were to come to you, Arnold."

"Master Dicky's playing truant: he has gone off with some of the guests," observed Dr. Knox.

"Well, mamma is putting herself into a frightful fever over him, Arnold. That old well in the field at the back was opened the day before yesterday; she says Dicky may have strayed there and fallen in."

"Dicky's after more mischief than that," said the Doctor, sagely. "A well in a solitary field would have no charms for Dicky. I tell you, Lotty, he must have marched home with somebody or other. Had you any lads up there to-night?"

"No, not any. You know mamma never will have them. Lads, *and* Dicky, would be too much."

"If Master Dicky have really gone off, as the Doctor thinks, I'd lay my next quarter's wages that it's with Captain Collinson," cried Sally. "He is always wanting to be after the captain."

Lotty lifted her face, a gleam of intelligence flashing across it. "Perhaps that's it," she said; "I should not wonder if it is. He has strayed off after, or with, Captain Collinson. What is to be done, Arnold?"

"Not strayed with him, I should think," observed the Doctor. "Captain Collinson, if he possesses any

sense or consideration, would order Dicky back at once."

"Won't you come with us to the Captain's lodgings, Arnold, and see?" cried Charlotte. "It would not do, would it, for us to go there alone at this time of night? The Captain may be in bed."

Arnold Knox looked at his sister; looked at the three of them, as if he thought they were enough without him. He was nearly done up with his long day's work.

"I suppose I had better go with you, Lotty," he said. "Though I don't think Captain Collinson would kidnap any one of you if you went alone."

"Oh dear, no; it is Mina he wants to kidnap, not us," answered Lotty, freely. And Arnold glanced at her keenly as he heard the words.

Did you ever know a fellow in the hey-day of his health and restlessness who was not ready for any night expedition—especially if it were to search after something lost? Dr. Knox took up his hat to accompany the visitors, and we three took up ours.

We proceeded in a body through the moonlit streets to Collinson's lodgings; the few stragglers we met no doubt taking us all for benighted wayfarers, trudging home from some one or other of the noted Lefford soirées. Collinson had the rooms at the hairdresser's—good rooms, famed as the best lodgings in the town. The gas was alight in his sitting-room

over the shop; a pretty fair proof that the Captain was yet up.

"Stay, Lotty," said Dr. Knox, arresting her impatient hand, that was lifted to pull the bell. "No need to arouse the house: I daresay Pink and his family are in bed. I will go up to Collinson."

It was easy to say so, but difficult to do it. Dr. Knox turned the handle of the door to enter, and found it fastened. He had to ring, after all.

Nobody answered it. Another ring and another shared the same fate. Dr. Knox then searched for some small loose stones, and flung them up at the window. It brought forth no more than the bell had.

"Dicky can't be there, or that gravel would have brought him to the window," decided Lotty. "I should say Captain Collinson is not there, either."

"He may be in his chamber at the back," observed Dr. Knox. And he rang again.

Presently, after a spell of at least ten minutes' waiting, and no end of ringing, an upper window was opened and a head appeared—that of the hairdresser.

"Whatever's the matter?" called out he, seeing the lot of us below. "It's not fire, is it?"

"I am sorry to disturb you, Pink," called back Dr. Knox. "It is Captain Collinson I want. Is he in, do you know?"

"Yes, sir; he came in about twenty minutes ago, and somebody with him, for I heard him talking,"

answered Pink. "He must be in his sitting-room, if he is not gone to bed."

"There is a light in the room, but I don't think he can be in. I have thrown up some gravel, and he does not answer."

"I'll come down and see, sir."

Pink, the most obliging little man in the world, descended to the Captain's room and thence to us at the door. Captain Collinson was not in. He had gone out again, and left his gas alight.

"You say some one came in with him, Pink. Was it a young lad?"

"I can't tell, sir. I heard the Captain's latch-key, and I heard him come on upstairs, talking to somebody; but I was just dropping off to sleep, so did not take much notice."

That the somebody was young Dick, and that Captain Collinson had gone out to march Dick home again, seemed only probable. There was nothing for it but to go on to Rose Villa and ascertain; and we started for it, after a short consultation.

"I shall not have the remotest idea where to look for Dick if he is not there," remarked Dr. Knox.

"And in that case, I do believe mamma will have a fit," added Charlotte. "A real fit, I mean, Arnold. I wish something could be done with Dicky! The house is always in a commotion."

Captain Collinson was at Rose Villa, whether Dicky was or not. At the garden gate, talking to Mina in the moonlight, stood he, apparently saying good-night to her.

"Dicky? oh dear, yes; I have just brought Dicky back," laughed the Captain, before Dr. Knox had well spoken his young half-brother's name, while Mina ran indoors like a frightened hare. "Upon getting home to my rooms just now I found some small mortal stealing in after me, and it proved to be Dicky. He followed me home to get a top I had promised him, and which I forgot to bring up here when I came to-night."

"I hope you did not give it him," said Dr. Knox.

"Yes, I did. I should never have got him back without," added the Captain. "Good-night."

He laughed again as he went away. Dicky's vagaries seemed to be rare fun for him.

Dicky was spinning the top on the kitchen table when we went in—for that's where they had all gathered: Mrs. Knox, Gerty, Kate, and the cook. A big humming-top, nearly as large and as noisy as Dick. Dr. Knox caught up the top and caught Dicky by the hand, and took both into the parlour.

"Now then, sir!" he sternly asked. "What did you mean by this night's escapade?"

"Oh, Arnold, don't scold him," implored Mrs. Knox,

following them in with her hands held up. "It *was* naughty of him, of course, and it gave me a dreadful fright; but it was perhaps excusable, and he is safe at home again. The Captain was to bring the top, and did not, and poor Dicky ran after him to get it."

"You be quiet, Arnold; I am not to be scolded," put in cunning Dicky. "You just give me my top."

"As to scolding you, I don't know that it would be of any further use: the time seems to have gone by for it, and I must take other measures," spoke Dr. Knox. "Come up to bed now, sir. I shall see you in it before I leave."

"But I want my top."

"Which you will not have," said the Doctor: and he marched off Dicky.

"How cross you are with him, Arnold!" spoke his step-mother when the Doctor came down again, leaving Dicky howling on his pillow for the top.

"It needs somebody to be cross with him," observed Dr. Knox.

"He is only a little boy, remember."

"He is big enough and old enough to be checked and corrected—if it ever is to be done at all. I will see you to-morrow: I wish to have some conversation with you."

"About Dicky?" she hastily asked.

"About him and other things. Mina," he added

in a low tone, as he passed her on his way out, but I, being next to him, caught the words, "I did not like to see you at the gate with Captain Collinson at this hour. Do not let it occur again. Young maidens cannot be too modest."

And, at the reproof, Miss Mina coloured to the very roots of her hair.

II.

THEY sat in the small garden room, its glass doors open to the spring air, now becoming redolent of the approaching summer. Mrs. Knox wore an untidy cotton gown, of a flaming crimson-and-white pattern, and her dark face looked hot and angry. Dr. Knox, sitting behind the table, was being annoyed as much as he could be annoyed—and no one ever annoyed him but his step-mother—as the lines in his patient brow betrayed.

"It is for his own good that I suggest this; his best welfare," urged Dr. Knox. "Left to exercise his will much longer, he must not be. Therefore I say that he must be placed entirely at school."

"You only propose it to thwart me," cried Mrs. Knox. "A fine cost it will be!"

"It will not be your cost. I pay his schooling now, and I shall pay it then. My father left me, young though I was, Dicky's guardian, and I must do this. I wonder you do not see that it will be the very best thing for Dicky. Everybody but yourself sees that, as things are, the boy is being ruined."

Mrs. Knox looked sullenly through the open doors

by which she sat; she tapped her foot impatiently upon the worn mat, lying on the threshold.

"I know you'll not rest until you have carried your point and separated us, Arnold; it has been in your mind to do it this long while. And my boy is the only thing I care for in life."

"It is for Dicky's own best interest," reiterated Dr. Knox. "Of course he is dear to you; it would be unnatural if he were not; but you surely must wish to see him grow up a good and self-reliant man: not an idle and self-indulgent one."

"Why don't you say outright that your resolve is taken and nothing can alter it; that you are going to banish him to school to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow, but he shall go at the half-quarter. The child will be ten times happier for it; believe that."

"Do you *really* mean it?" she questioned, her black eyes flashing fury at Arnold. "Will nothing deter you?"

"Nothing," he replied, in a low, firm tone. "I—bear with me a moment, mother—I cannot let Dicky run riot any longer. He is growing up the very incarnation of selfishness; he thinks the world was made for him alone; you and his sisters are only regarded by him as so many ministers to his good pleasure. See how he treats you all. See how he treats the servants. Were I to allow this state of things to continue,

how should I be fulfilling my obligation to my dead father?—my father and Dicky's."

"I will hear no more," spoke Mrs. Knox, possibly thinking the argument was getting too strong for her. "*I* have wanted to speak to you, Arnold, and I may as well do it now. Things must be put on a different footing up here."

"What things?"

"Money matters. I cannot continue to do upon my small income."

Arnold Knox passed his hand across his troubled brow, almost in despair. Oh, what a weary subject this was! Not for long together did she ever give him rest from it.

"Your income is sufficient, mother; I am tired of saying it. It is between three and four hundred a-year; and you are free from house rent."

"Why don't you remind me that the house is yours, and have done with it!" she cried, her voice harsh and coarse as a raven's.

"Well, it is mine," he said good-humouredly.

"Yes; and instead of settling it upon me when you married, you must needs settle it on your wife! Don't *you* talk of selfishness, Arnold."

"My wife does not derive any benefit from it. It has made no difference to you."

"She would derive it, though, if you died. Where should I be then?"

"I am not going to die, I hope. Oh, mother, if you only knew how these discussions vex me!"

"Then you should show yourself generous."

"Generous!" he exclaimed, in a pained tone. And, goaded to it by his remembrance of what he had done for her in the present and in the past, he went on to speak more plainly than he had ever spoken yet. "Do you forget that a great portion of what you enjoy should, by right, be mine? *Is* mine!"

"Yours!" she scornfully said.

"Yes: mine. Not by legal right, but by moral. When my father died he left the whole of his property to you. Considerably more than the half of that property had been brought to him by my mother: some people might have thought that much should have descended to her son."

"He did not leave me the whole. You had a share."

"Not of the income. I had a sum of five hundred pounds left me, for a specific purpose—the completion of my medical education. Mother, I have never grumbled at this; never. It was my father's will and pleasure that the whole should be yours, and that it should go to your children after you; and I am content to think that he did for the best; the house was obliged to come to me; it had been so settled at my mother's marriage; but you have continued to live in it, and I have not said you nay."

"It is like you to remind me of all this!"

"I could remind you of more," he rejoined, chafing at her unjust words, at her resentful manner. "That for years I impoverished myself to help you to augment this income. Three parts of what I earned, before my partnership with Mr. Tamlyn, I gave to you."

"Well, I needed it. Do, for goodness' sake, let the past alone, if you can: where's the use of recalling it? Would you have us starve? Would you see me taken off to prison? And that's what it will come to, unless I can get some money to pay up with. That table-drawer that you've got your elbow on, is chock-full of bills. I've not paid one for these six months."

"I cannot think what it is you do with your money?"

"Do with my money? Why, it goes in a hundred ways. How very ignorant you are, Arnold. Look at what dress costs, for myself and four girls! Look at what the soirées cost! We have to give choice dishes now; lobster salads and raspberry creams, and all kinds of expensive things. Madame St. Vincent introduced *that*."

"You must put down the soirées and the dress—if you cannot keep them within the bounds of your income."

"Thank you. Just as I had to put down the pony-carriage and James. How cruel you are, Arnold!"

"I hope I am not. I do not wish to be."

"It will take two hundred pounds to set me straight; and I must have it from you, or from somebody else," avowed Mrs. Knox.

"You certainly cannot have it, or any portion of it, from me. My expenses are heavy now, and I have my own children coming on."

His tone was unmistakably decisive, and Mrs. Knox saw that it was so. For many years she had been in the habit of regarding Arnold as analogous to a bucket in a well, which brings up water every time it is let down. Just so had he brought up money for her from his pocket every time she worried for it. But that was over now: and he had to bear these reproaches periodically.

"You know that you *can* let me have it, Arnold. You can lend it me from Mina's money."

His face flushed slightly. He pushed his fair hair back with a gesture of annoyance.

"The last time you spoke of *that* I begged you never to mention it again," he said, in a low tone. "Why, what do you take me for, mother?"

"Take you for?"

"You must know that I could not touch Mina's money without becoming a false trustee. Men have been brought to the Criminal Bar to answer for a less crime than that would be."

"If Mina married, you would have to hand over the whole of it."

"Of course I should. First of all taking care that it was settled upon her."

"I don't see the necessity of that. Mina could let me have what she pleased of it."

"Talking of Mina," resumed Dr. Knox, passing by her remark, "I think you must look a little closely after her. She is more intimate, I fancy, with Captain Collinson than is desirable, and——"

"Suppose Captain Collinson wants to marry her?" interrupted Mrs. Knox.

"Has he told you that he wants to?"

"No; not in so many words. But he evidently likes her. What a good match it would be!"

"Mina is too young to be married yet. And Captain Collinson cannot, I should suppose, have any intention of the sort. If he had, he would speak out: when it would be time enough to consider and discuss his proposal. Until he does speak, I must beg of you not to allow Mina to be alone with him."

"She never is alone with him."

"I think she is, at odd moments. Only last night I saw her with him at the gate. Previous to that, while your soirée was going on, Dicky—I believe he could tell you so if you asked him—saw them walking together in the garden, the Captain's arm round her waist."

"Girls are so fond of flirting! And young men think no harm of a little passing familiarity."

"Just so. But for remembering this, I should speak to Captain Collinson. The thought, that there may be nothing serious in it, prevents me. At any rate, I beg of you to take care of Mina."

"And the money I want?" she asked, as he took up his hat to go.

But Dr. Knox, shortly repeating that he had no money to give her, made his escape. He had been ruffled enough already. One thing was certain: that if some beneficent sprite from fairyland increased Mrs. Knox's annual income cent. per cent., she would still, and ever, be in embarrassment. Arnold knew this.

Mrs. Knox sat on, revolving difficulties. How many similar interviews she had held with her stepson, and how often he had been brought round to pay her bills, she could but remember. Would he do it now? A most unpleasant doubt, that he would not, lay upon her.

Presently the entrance was darkened by some tall form interposing itself between herself and the sunlight. She glanced up and saw Captain Collinson. He stood there smiling, his tasselled cane jauntily swayed in his left hand.

"My dear madam, you look troubled. Is anything amiss?"

"Troubled! the world's full of trouble, I think," spoke Mrs. Knox, in a pettish kind of way. "Dr. Knox has been here to vex me."

Captain Collinson stepped airily in, and sat down near Mrs. Knox, his eyes expressing proper concern: indignation blended with sympathy.

"Very inconsiderate of Dr. Knox: very wrong! Can I help you in any way, my dear lady?"

"Arnold is always inconsiderate. First, he begins upon me about Dicky, threatening to put him altogether away at school, poor ill-used child! Next, he——"

"Sweet little angel!" interlarded the Captain.

"Next, he refuses to lend me a trifling sum of money—and he knows how badly I want it!"

"Paltry!" ejaculated the Captain. "When he must be making so much of it!"

"Rolling in it, so to say," confirmed Mr. Knox. "Look at the large practice he has! But if he did not give me any of his, he might advance me a trifle of Mina's."

"Of course he might," warmly acquiesced Captain Collinson.

What with the warmth and the sympathy, Mrs. Knox rather lost her head. Many of us are betrayed on occasion into doing the same. That is, she said more than she should have said.

"You see, if Mina married, as I pointed out to Arnold, the money would no longer be under his control at all. It would be hers to do as she pleased with. She is a dear, good, generous girl, and would

not scruple to let me have one or two hundred pounds. What would such a trifle be out of the whole seven thousand?"

"Very true; nothing at all," cried the Captain, toying with his handsome beard.

"But no; Arnold will not hear of it: he answered me in a way that I should not like to repeat. He also said he should take care, if Mina did marry before she was of age, that her money was settled upon her; said it on purpose to thwart me."

"Cruel!" aspirated the Captain.

"Some girls might be tempted to marry off-hand, and say nothing to him, if only to get her fortune out of his harsh control. I don't say Mina would."

"Miser! My dear madam, rely upon it that whenever Miss Mina does marry, her husband will join with her in letting you have as much money as you wish. I am sure it would be his pride and pleasure so to do."

Was it a covert promise? meant to be understood as such? Mrs. Knox took it for one. She came out of her dumps, and felt exalted to the seventh heaven.

Meanwhile, Arnold Knox was with Lady Jenkins, to whom he had gone on quitting his step-mother. The old lady, up and dressed, sat in her dining-room. There appeared to be no change in her condition: drowsy, lethargic, gentle, yielding; imbecile, or not many shades removed from it. And yet, neither Dr.

Knox nor his fellow-practitioner could see any cause to account for this. Of bodily illness she had none: except that she seemed feeble.

"I wish you would tell me what it is you are taking," said Dr. Knox, bending over her and speaking in a low, persuasive tone. "I fear that you are taking something that does you harm."

Lady Jenkins looked up at him, apparently trying to consider. "I've not had anything since I took the physic," she said.

"What physic?"

"The bottles that Mr. Tamlyn sent me."

"But that was when you were ill. Are you sure you have not taken anything else?—that you are not taking anything? Any"—he dropped his voice to a still lower key—"opiates? Laudanum, for instance?"

Lady Jenkins shook her head. "I never took any sort of opiate in my life."

"Then it is being given to her without her knowledge," mentally decided the Doctor. "I hear you were at the next door last night, as gay as the best of them," he resumed aloud, changing his tone to a light one.

"Ay. I put on my new bronze satin gown: Patty said I was to. Janet sang her pretty songs."

"Did she? When are you coming to spend an evening with us? She will sing them again for you."

"I'd like to come—if I may."

"If you may! There's nothing to prevent it. You are quite well enough."

"There's Patty. We shall have to ask her whether I may."

Anything Arnold Knox might have rejoined to this was stopped by the entrance of Patty herself, a light blue shawl on her shoulders. A momentary surprise crossed her face at sight of the Doctor.

"Oh, Dr. Knox! I did not know you were here," she said, as she threw off the shawl. "I was running about the garden for a few minutes. What a lovely day it is!—the sun so warm."

"It is that. Lady Jenkins ought to be out in it. Should you not like to take a run in the garden?" he laughingly added to her.

"Should I, Patty?"

The utter abnegation of will, both of tone and look, as she cast an appealing glance at her companion, struck Dr. Knox forcibly. He looked at both of them from under his rather over-hanging eyebrows. Did Madame St. Vincent extort this obedience?—or was it simply the old lady's imbecility? Surely it must be the latter.

"I think," said Madame, "a walk in the garden will be very pleasant for you, dear Lady Jenkins. Lettice shall bring down your things. The may-tree is budding beautifully."

"Already!" said the Doctor: "I should like to see

it. Will you go with me, Madame? I have two minutes to spare."

Madame St. Vincent, showing no surprise, though she may have felt it, put the blue shawl on her shoulders again and followed Dr. Knox. The may-tree was nearly at the end of the garden, down by the shrubbery.

"Mr. Tamlyn mentioned to you, I believe, that we suspected something improper, in the shape of opiates, was being given to Lady Jenkins," began Dr. Knox, never as much as lifting his eyes to the budding may-tree.

"Yes; I remember that he did," replied Madame St. Vincent. "I hardly gave it a second thought."

"Tamlyn said you had a difficulty in believing it. Nevertheless, I feel assured that it is so."

"Impossible, Dr. Knox."

"It seems impossible to you, I daresay. But that it is being done, I would stake my head upon. Lady Jenkins is being stupefied in some way: and I have brought you out here to tell you so, and to ask your co-operation in tracing out the culprit."

"But—I beg your pardon, Dr. Knox—who would give her anything of the kind? You don't suspect me, I hope."

"If I suspected you, my dear lady, I should not be talking to you as I am. The person we must suspect is Lettice Lane."

"Lettice Lane!"

"I have reason to think it. Lettice Lane's antecedents are not, I fear, quite so clear as they might be: though it is only recently I have known this. At any rate, she is the personal attendant of Lady Jenkins; the only one of them who has the opportunity of being alone with her. I must beg of you to watch Lettice Lane."

Mme. St. Vincent looked a little bewildered; perhaps felt so. Stretching up her hand, she plucked one of the budding may-blossoms.

"Mr. Tamlyn hinted at Lettice also. I have always felt confidence in Lettice. As to drugs—Dr. Knox, I don't believe a word of it."

"*Lady Jenkins is being drugged*," emphatically pronounced Dr. Knox. "And you must watch Lettice Lane. If Lettice is innocent, we must look elsewhere."

"Shall I tax Lettice with it?"

"Certainly not. You would make a good detective," he added with a laugh, "opening your hand to the enemy. Surely, Mme. St. Vincent, you must yourself see that Lady Jenkins is being tampered with. Look at her state this morning: though she is not quite as bad as she is sometimes."

"I have known some old people sleep nearly perpetually."

"So have I. But theirs is simply natural sleep,

induced by exhausted nature: hers is not natural. She is stupefied."

"Stupefied with the natural decay of her powers," dissented Madame. "But—to drug her! No, I cannot believe it. And where would be the motive?"

"That I know not. But I am sure I am not mistaken," he added, decisively. "You will watch Lettice Lane?"

"I will," she answered, after a pause. "Of course it *may* be as you say; I now see it. I will watch her to the very utmost of my ability from this hour."

III.

"DEAR JOHNNY,

"I expect your stay at Lefford is drawing towards a close; mine is, here. It might be pleasant if we travelled home together. I could take Lefford on my way—starting from hence by an early train—and pick you up. You need somebody to take care of you, you know. Let me hear when you intend to be ready. I will arrange my departure accordingly.

"Hope you have enjoyed yourself, old fellow.

"Ever yours, J. T."

The above letter from Tod, who was still in Leicestershire, reached me one morning at breakfast-time. Dr. Knox and Janet, old Tamlyn—all the lot of them—called out that they could not spare me yet. Even Cattledon graciously intimated that she should miss me. Janet wrote to Tod, telling him he was to take Lefford on his way, as he proposed, and to stay a week when he did come.

It was, I think, that same day that some news reached us touching Captain Collinson—that he was going to be married. At least that he had made an

offer, and was accepted. Not to Mina Knox; but to an old girl (the epithet was Sam's) named Belmont. Miss Belmont lived with her father at a nice place on the London Road, half a mile beyond Jenkins House; he had a great deal of money, and she was his only child. She was very plain, very dowdy, and quite forty years of age; but very good, going about amidst the poor with tracts and soup. If the tidings were true, and Captain Collinson *had* made Miss Belmont an offer, it appeared pretty evident that his object was her money: he could not well have fallen in love with her, or court a wife so much older than himself.

When taxed with the fact—and it was old Tamlyn who did it, meeting him opposite the market-house—Collinson simpered, and stroked his dark beard, and said Lefford was fond of marvels. But he did not deny it. Half an hour later he and Miss Belmont were seen together in the High Street. She had her old cloth mantle on and her brown bonnet, as close as a Quaker's, and carried her flat district basket in her hand. The Captain presented a contrast, with his superb dandy-cut clothes and his flourishing ebony cane.

"I think it must be quite true," Janet observed, as we watched them pass the house. "And I shall be glad if it is: Arnold has been tormenting himself with the fancy that the gallant Captain was thinking of little Mina."

A day or two after this, it chanced that Dr. Knox had to visit Sir Henry Westmorland, who had managed to give a hard twist to his ankle. Sir Henry was one of those sociable, good-hearted men that nobody can help liking; a rather elderly bachelor. He and Tamlyn were old friends, and we had all dined at Foxgrove about a week before.

"Would you like to go over with me, Johnny?" asked Dr. Knox when he was starting.

I said I should like it very much, and got into the "conveyance," the Doctor letting me drive. Thomas was not with us. We soon reached Foxgrove: a low, straggling, red-brick mansion, standing in a small park, about two miles and a half from Lefford.

Dr. Knox went in; leaving me and the conveyance on the smooth wide gravel-drive before the house. Presently a groom came up to take charge of it, saying Sir Henry was asking for me. He had seen me from the window.

Sir Henry was lying on a sofa near the window, and Knox was already beginning upon the ankle. A little, gentlemanly man, nearly bald, sat on the ottoman in the middle of the room. I found it was one Major Leckie.

Some trifle—are these trifles *chance*?—turned the conversation upon India. I think Knox spoke of some snake-bite in a man's ankle that had laid him by for a month or two: it was no other than the late whilom

Mayor, Sir Daniel Jenkins. Upon which, Major Leckie began relating his experience of some reptile bites in India. The Major had been home nearly two years upon sick leave, he said, and was now going back again.

"The 30th Bengal Cavalry!" repeated Dr. Knox, as Major Leckie happened to mention that regiment—which was his, and the Doctor remembered that it was Captain Collinson's. "One of the officers of that regiment is staying here now."

"Is he!" cried the Major, briskly. "Which of them?"

"Captain Collinson."

"Collinson!" echoed the Major, his whole face alight with pleasure. "Where is he? How long has he been here? I did not know he had left India."

"He came home last autumn, I fancy; was not well, and got twelve months' leave. He has been staying at Lefford for some time."

"I should like to see him! Good old Collinson! He and I were close friends. He is a nice fellow."

"Old you style him!" cried Dr. Knox. "I should rather call him young—of the two."

Major Leckie laughed. "It is a word we are all given to use, Doctor. Of course Collinson's not old in years. Why is he staying at Lefford?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Unless it is that he has fallen in love. I heard him remark one day that the air of the place suited him."

"Ah ha, Master Collinson!" laughed the Major. "In love, are you, sir! Caught at last, are you! Who is the lady?"

"Nay, I spoke only in jest," returned Dr. Knox. "He seems to be a general admirer; but I don't know that it is anybody in particular. Report has mentioned one or two ladies, but report is often a false town crier."

"Well, she will be in luck—whoever gets him. He is one of the nicest, truest fellows I know; and will make a rare good husband."

"It is said he has private means. Do you know whether that's true?"

"He has very good private means. His father left him a fortune. Sometimes we fancy he will not stay with us long. I should not be surprised if he sells out while he is at home, and settles down."

"Johnny Ludlow heard him say something the other night to that effect," observed the Doctor, looking at me.

"Yes," I said, confirming the words. "He is about buying an estate now, I believe. But he talked of going back to India for a few years."

"I hope he will. There's not a man amongst the lot of us, that I would not rather spare than Collinson. I *should* like to see him. I might walk into Lefford now—if you will give me his address, Doctor. Will you spare me for an hour or two, Sir Henry?"

"Well, I must, I suppose," grumbled Sir Henry. "It's rather bad of you, though, Leckie; and after putting me off with so miserably short a stay. You get here at ten o'clock last night, and you go off at ten o'clock to-night! Fine behaviour that is!"

"I am obliged to go to-night, Westmorland; you know I am, and I could not get to you earlier, although I tried. I won't be away a minute longer than I can help. I can walk into Lefford in half an hour —my pace is a quick one. No; and I won't stay an unconscionable time with Collinson," he added, in answer to a growl of the baronet's. "Trust me. I'll be back under two hours."

"Bring him back with you for the rest of the day," said Sir Henry.

"Oh, thank you. And I am sure you will say he is the best fellow going. I wonder you and he have not found out one another before."

"If you don't mind taking a seat in yonder nondescript vehicle—that Mr. Johnny Ludlow here has the audacity to say must have been built in the year One," laughed Dr. Knox, pointing outside, "I can drive you to Captain Collinson's lodgings."

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," cried the Major, laughing also. "What style of vehicle do you call it?"

"*We* call it the conveyance. As to its style—well I never had the opportunity of asking that of the

builder. I believe my father bought it second-hand when he first went into practice many a year ago."

The Doctor drove this time; Major Leckie sitting beside him, I in the perch behind. Leaving the Major at the hairdresser's, upon reaching Lefford, Dr. Knox and I went home. And this is what occurred—as we heard later.

Ringing at the private door, which was Captain Collinson's proper entrance, a young servant girl appeared, and—after the manner of many young country servants—sent Major Leckie alone up to Captain Collinson's rooms, saying she supposed the Captain was at home. It turned out that he was not at home. Seated before the fire was a gentleman in a crimson dressing-gown and slippers, smoking a huge pipe.

"Come in," cried out he, in answer to the Major's knock.

"I beg your pardon," said the Major, entering. "I understood that Captain Collinson lodged here."

"He does lodge here," replied he of the dressing-gown, putting his pipe into the fender, as he rose. "What is it that you want with him?'

"I only called to see him. I am one of his brother officers—home on sick leave; as I understand he is."

"Collinson is out," said the gentleman. "I am sorry it should happen so. Can you leave any message?"

"Will he be long? I should much like to see him."

"He will be back to dinner to-night; not much before that, I think. He is gone by train to—to—some place a few miles off. Boom—or Room—or Doom—or some such name. I am a stranger here."

"Toome, I suppose," remarked the Major. "It's the last station before you get to Lefford—I noticed the name last night. I am very sorry. I should like to have seen Collinson. Tell him so, will you. I am Major Leckie."

"You will be calling again, perhaps?"

"I can't do that. I must spend the rest of this day with my friend, Sir Henry Westmorland, and I leave to-night. Tell Collinson that I embark in a few days. Stay: this is my address in London, if he will write to me. I wonder he did not attempt to find me out—I came home before he did: and he knew that he could always get my address at my bankers'."

"I will tell Collinson all you say, Major Leckie," said the stranger, glancing at the card. "It is a pity he is out."

"Should he come back in time—though I fear, by what you say, there's little chance of it—be so good as to say that Sir Henry Westmorland will be happy to see him to dinner this evening at Foxgrove, at six o'clock——and to come over as much earlier than that as he can."

With the last words, Major Leckie left, Collinson's friend politely attending him down to the front door.

I was standing at Mr. Tamlyn's gate as he passed it on his way back to Foxgrove. Dr. Knox, then going off on foot to see a patient, came across the yard from the surgery at the same moment.

"Such a mischance!" the Major stopped in his rapid walk to say to us. "Collinson has gone to Toome to day. I saw a friend of his, who is staying with him, and he thinks he won't be back before night."

"I did not know Collinson had anybody staying with him," remarked the Doctor. "Somebody called in upon him, probably."

"This man is evidently staying with him; making himself at home too," said the Major. "He was in a dressing-gown and slippers, and had his feet on the fender, smoking a pipe. A tall, dark fellow, face all hair."

"Why, that is Collinson himself," cried I.

"Not a bit of it," said the Major. "This man is no more like Collinson—except that Collinson is dark and has a beard—than he is like me. He said he was a stranger in the place."

A rapid conclusion crossed me that it must be a brother of Collinson's—for a resemblance to himself, according to the Major's description, there no doubt was. Major Leckie wished me good day, and continued his way up the street, Dr. Knox with him.

"What are you gazing at, Johnny Ludlow?"

I turned at the question, and saw Charlotte Knox. She was coming to call on Janet. We stood there talking of one thing and another. I told Charlotte that Collinson's brother, as I took it to be, was staying with him; and Charlotte told me of a quarrel she had just had with Mina on the score of the Captain.

"Mina won't believe a word against him, Johnny. When I say he is nothing but a flirt, that he is only flirting with her, she bids me hold my tongue. She quite scoffs at the notion that he would like to marry Miss Belmont."

"Have you seen any more letters, that concern me, in at Mme. St. Vincent's?" I asked.

"Do you think I should be likely to?—or that such letters are as plentiful as blackberries?" retorted Charlotte. "And you?—have you discovered the key to that letter?"

"I have not discovered it, Charlotte. I have taxed my memory in vain. Never a girl, no matter whose sister she may be, can I recall to mind as being likely to owe me a grudge."

"It was not that the girl owed you a grudge," quickly spoke Charlotte. "It was that she must not meet you."

"Does not the one thing imply the other? I can't think of anyone. There was a young lady, indeed, in the years gone by, when I was not much more than a lad, who—may—have—taken up a prejudice against

me," I added slowly and thoughtfully, for I was hardly sure of what I said. "But she cannot have anything to do with the present matter, and I am quite sure she was not a sister of Mme. St. Vincent."

"What was her name?" asked Charlotte.

"Sophie Chalk."

LIGHT.

I.

Tod arrived at Lefford. I met him at the train, just as I had met Miss Cattledon, who was with us still. As we walked out of the station together, many a man cast a glance after the tall, fine young fellow—who looked strong enough to move the world, if, like Archimedes, the geometrician of Syracuse, he had only possessed the necessary lever.

"Shall you be able to stay a week, Tod?"

"Two weeks if they'd like it, Johnny. How you have picked up, lad!"

"Picked up?"

"In looks. They are all your own again. Glad to see it, old fellow."

Some few days had elapsed since the latest event recorded in this veritable little history—the call that Major Leckie made on Captain Collinson, and found his brother there, instead of himself—but no change worth noting to the reader had occurred in the town's politics. Lady Jenkins was ailing as much as ever, and Madame St. Vincent was keeping a sharp watch

on the maid, Lettice Lane, without, as yet, detecting her in any evil practices: the soirées were numerous, one being held at some house or other every night in the work-a-day week: and the engagement of Captain Collinson to Miss Belmont was now talked of as an assured fact. Collinson himself had been away from Lefford during these intervening days. Pink, the hair-dresser, thought he had taken a run up to London, on some little matter of business. As to the brother, we had heard no more of him.

But, if Captain Collinson had taken a run up to London, he had unquestionably run down again, though not to Lefford. On the day but one before the coming of Tod, Janet and Miss Cattledon went over by train to do some shopping at the county town, which stood fifteen miles from Lefford, I being with them. Turning into a pastry-cook's in the middle of the day to get something to eat, we turned in upon Captain Collinson. He sat at a white marble-topped table in the corner of the shop, eating an oyster patty.

"We heard you were in London," said Janet, shaking hands with him, as he rose to offer her his seat.

"Got back this morning. Shall be at Lefford to-morrow: perhaps to-night," he answered.

He stood gobbling up his patty quickly. I said something to him, just because the recollection came into my mind, about the visit of his brother.

"My brother!" he exclaimed in answer, staring at me with all his eyes. "What brother? How do you know anything about my brother?"

"Major Leckie saw him when he called at your lodgings. Saw him instead of you. You had gone to Toome. We took it to be your brother, from the description; he was so like yourself."

The Captain smiled. "I forgot that," he said. "We *are* much alike. Ned told me of Leckie's call. A pity I could not see him! Things always happen cross and contrary. Has Leckie left Foxgrove yet?"

"Oh, he left it that same night. I should think he is on his way back to India by this time."

"His visit to Lefford seems to have been as flying a one as my brother's was, and *his* did not last a day. How much?" to the girl behind the counter. "Sixpence? There it is." And, with a general adieu nodded to the rest of us, the Captain left the shop.

"I don't like that dandy," spoke Cattledon, in her severest tone. "I have said so before. I'm sure he is a man who cannot be trusted."

I answered nothing; but I had for a little time now thought the same. There was that about him that gave you the idea he was in some way or other not *true*. And it may as well be mentioned here that Captain Collinson got back to Lefford that same evening, in time to make his appearance at Mrs. Parker's

soirée, at which both Miss Belmont and Mina Knox were present.

So now we come to Tod again, and to the day of his arrival. Talking of one thing and another, telling him of this and that, of the native politics, as we all like to do when a stranger comes to set himself down, however temporarily, amidst us, I mentioned the *familiarity* that in two of the people struck upon my memory. Never did I see this same Captain Collinson, never did I see Madame St. Vincent, or hear them speak, or listen to their laugh, but the feeling that I had met them before—been, so to say, intimate with both one and the other—came forcibly upon me.

"And yet it would seem, upon the face of things, that I never have," I continued to Tod, when telling of this. "Mme. St. Vincent says she never left the South of France until last year; and the Captain has been nearly all his life in India."

"You know you do take fancies, Johnny."

"True. But, are not those fancies generally borne out by the result? Anyway, they puzzle me, both of them: and there's a ring in their voices that——"

"A ring in their voices!" put in Tod, laughing.

"Say an accent, then; especially in Madame's; and it sounds, to my ears, unmistakably Worcestershire."

"Johnny, you *are* fanciful!"

I never got anything better from Tod. "You will

have the honour of meeting them both here to-night," I said to him, "for it is Janet's turn to give the soirée, and I know they are expected."

Evening came. At six o'clock the first instalment of the guests knocked at the door; by half-past six the soirée was in full glory: a regular crowd. Everyone seemed to have come, with the exception of the ladies from Jenkins House. Sam Jenkins brought in their excuses.

Sam had run up to Jenkins House with some physic for the butler, who said he had a surfeit (from drinking too much old ale, Tamlyn thought), and Sam had made use of the opportunity to see his aunt. Madame St. Vincent objected. It would try the dear old lady too much, Madame said. She was lying in a sweet sleep on the sofa in her own room; had been quite blithe and lively all day, but was drowsy now; and she had better not be disturbed until bed-time. Perhaps Mr. Sam would kindly make their excuses to Mrs. Arnold Knox.

"Can't you come yourself, Madame?" asked Sam, politely. "If Aunt Jenkins is asleep, and means to keep asleep till bed-time, she can't want you."

"I could not think of leaving her, dear Mr. Sam," objected Madame. "She looks for me the moment she wakes."

So Sam, I say, brought back the message. Putting himself into his evening coat as speedily as might be,

he came into the room while tea was going on, and delivered Madame's excuses to Janet as distinctly as the clatter of cups and saucers allowed. You should have seen Cattledon that evening:—in a grey silk gown that stood on end, a gold necklace, and dancing shoes.

"This is the second soirée this week that Lady Jenkins has failed to appear at," spoke Mrs. Knox—not Janet—in a resentful tone. "My firm opinion is that Mme. St. Vincent keeps her away."

"Keeps her away!" cried Arnold. "Why should she do that?"

"Well, yes; gives way to her fads and fancies about being ill, instead of rousing her out of them. As to *why* she does it," continued Mrs. Knox, "I suppose she is beginning to grow nervous about her. As if an innocent, quiet soirée could hurt Lady Jenkins!"

"Johnny," whispered Sam, subsiding into the background after delivering his message, "may I never stir again if I didn't see Collinson hiding in aunt's garden!"

"*Hiding* in your aunt's garden!" I exclaimed. "What was he doing that for?"

"Goodness knows. Did you ever notice a big bay-tree that you pass on the left, between the door and the gate? Well, he was standing behind it. I came out of the house at a double quick pace, knowing I should be late for the soirée, cleared the steps

at a leap, and the path to the gate at another. Too quick, I suppose, for Collinson. He was bending forward to look at the parlour windows, and drew back as I passed."

"Did you speak, Sam?"

"No, I came flying on, taking no notice. I dare-say he thinks I did not see him. One does not like, you know, to speak to a man who evidently wants to avoid you. But now—I wonder what he was doing there?" continued Sam, reflectively. "Watching Madame St. Vincent, I should say, through the lace curtains."

"But for what purpose?"

"I can't even imagine. There he was."

To my mind this sounded curious. But that Mina Knox was before my eyes—just at the moment listening to the whispers of Dan Jenkins—I should have thought the Captain was looking after her. Or, rather, *not* listening to Dan. Mina had a pained, restless look on her face, not in the least natural to it, and kept her head turned away. And the more Dan whispered, the more she turned it from him.

"Here he is, Sam."

Sam looked round at my words, and saw Captain Collinson, then coming in. He was got up to perfection as usual, and wore a white rose in his button-hole. His purple-black hair, beard, whiskers and moustache were grand; his voice had its ordinary

fashionable drawl. I saw Tod—at the opposite side of the room—cease talking with old Tamlyn, to fix his keen eyes on the Captain.

"Very sorry to be so late," apologised the Captain, bowing over Janet's hand. "Been detained at home writing letters for India. Overland mail goes out to-morrow night."

Sam gave me a knock with his elbow. "What a confounded story!" he whispered. "Wonder what the gallant Captain means, Johnny! Wonder what game he is up to?"

It was, I daresay, nearly an hour after this that I came across Tod. He was standing against the wall, laughing slightly to himself, evidently in some glee. Captain Collinson was at the piano opposite, his back to us, turning over the leaves for Caroline Parker, who was singing.

"What are you amused at, Tod?"

"At you, lad. Thinking what a muff you are."

"I always am a muff, I know. But why am I one just now in particular?"

"For not knowing that man," nodding towards Collinson. "I thought I recognised him as he came in; felt sure of him when I heard him speak. Men may disguise their faces almost at will; but not their voices, Johnny."

"Why, who is he?" I asked in surprise.

"I'll tell you when we are alone. I should have

known him had we met amid the Hottentots. I thought he was over in Australia; knew he went there."

"But—is he not Captain Collinson?"

Tod laughed. "Just as much as I am, Johnny. Of course he may have assumed the name of Collinson in place of his own: if so, nobody has a right, I take it, to say him nay. But, as to his being a Captain in the Bengal cavalry—well, I don't think he is."

"And you say I know him!"

"I say you ought to—but for being a muff. I suppose it is the mass of hair he is adorned with that has thrown you off the scent."

"But, where have I seen him, Tod? Who ——"

"Hush, lad. We may be overheard."

As a general rule, all the guests at these soirées left together. They did so to-night. The last to file out at the door were the Hampshires, with Mrs. Knox, her daughter, and Miss Mack—for Janet had made a point of inviting poor hard-worked, put-upon Macky. Both families lived in the London Road, and would go home in company. Dan had meant to escort Mina, but she pointedly told him he was not wanted, and took the offered arm of Captain Collinson. Upon which, Dan turned back in a huff. Sam laughed at that, and ran after them himself.

How long a time had elapsed afterwards, I hardly know. Perhaps half an hour; perhaps not so much.

We had not parted for the night: in fact, Mr. Tamlyn and Tod were still over the game at chess they had begun since supper; which game seemed not in a mood to be finished. I watched it: Dr. Knox and Miss Cattledon stood talking over the fire; while Janet, ever an active housekeeper, was in the supper-room, helping the maids to clear the table. In the midst of this, Charlotte Knox came back, rushing into the room in a state of intense excitement, with the news that Mina and Captain Collinson were eloping together.

The account she gave was this—though just at first nothing clear could be made out of her. Upon starting, the Hampshires, Mrs. Knox, and Miss Mack went on in front; Captain Collinson and Mina walked next, and Charlotte fell behind with Sam. Fell very much behind, as it appeared; for when people are talking of what interests them, their steps are apt to linger; and Sam was telling her of having seen Captain Collinson behind the bay-tree. It was a beautiful night, warm and pleasant.

Charlotte and Sam let the Captain and Mina get pretty nearly the length of a street before them; and *they*, in their turn, were as much behind the party in advance. Suddenly Sam exclaimed that the Captain was taking the wrong way. His good eyes had discerned that, instead of keeping straight on, which was the proper (and only) route to the London Road, he

and Mina had turned down the lane leading to the railway station. "Halloa!" he exclaimed to Charlotte, "what's that for?" "They must be dreaming," was Charlotte's laughing reply: "or, perhaps the Captain wants to take an excursion by a night train!" Whether anything in the last remark, spoken in jest, struck particularly on the mind of Sam, Charlotte did not know: away he started as if he had been shot, Charlotte running after him in curiosity. Arrived at the lane, Sam saw the other two flying along it, just as if they wanted to catch a train and had not a minute to do it in. Onward went Sam's long legs in pursuit; but the Captain's legs were long also, and he was pulling Mina with him: altogether Sam did not gain much upon them. The half-past eleven o'clock train was then gliding into the station, where it was timed to halt two minutes. The Captain and Mina dashed on to the platform, and, when Sam got up, he was putting her into the nearest carriage. Such was Charlotte's statement: and her eyes looked wild, and her breath came in gasps as she made it.

"Have they *gone?*—gone on by the train?" questioned Dr. Knox, who seemed unnaturally calm.

"Goodness, no!" panted the excited Charlotte. "Sam managed to get his arm round Mina's waist, and the Captain could not pull her away from him. It was a regular struggle on the platform, Arnold: I was afraid they'd pull her in two. I appealed to the

station-master, who stood by. I told him it was my sister, and that she was being kidnapped against her will; Sam also appealed to him. So he gave the signal when the time was up, and let the train go on."

"Not against her will, I fear," spoke Arnold Knox from between his condemning lips. "Where are they now, Lotty?"

"On the platform, quarrelling; and still struggling which shall keep possession of Mina. I came running here to fetch you, Arnold, and I believe I shall never get my breath back again."

With one accord we all, Cattledon excepted, set off to the station; even old Tamlyn proved he had some go in his legs yet. Tod reached it first: few young men could come up to him at running.

Sam Jenkins had exchanged his hold of Mina for a hold on Captain Collinson. The two were struggling together; but Sam's grasp was firm, and he held him as in a vice. "No, no," he was saying, "you don't escape me, Captain, until somebody comes here to take charge of Mina." As to Mina, little simpleton, she cowered in the shade of the corner, shivering and crying. The station-master and the two night porters stood about, gaping and staring.

Tod put his hand on the Captain's shoulder; his other hand momentarily holding back Dr. Knox.

"Since when have you been Captain Collinson," he quietly asked.

The Captain turned his angry eyes upon him. "What is that to you?" he retorted. "I am Captain Collinson; that is enough for you."

"Enough for me, and welcome. Not enough, as I judge, for this gentleman here," indicating the Doctor. "When I knew you your name was not Collinson."

"How dare you insult me?" hissed the Captain. "My name not Collinson!"

"Not at all!" was Tod's equable answer. "It used to be FABIAN PELL."

II.

THE history of the Clement-Pells and their downfall was given in the First Series of these stories, and the reader can have no difficulty in recalling Fabian to his memory. There are times, even to this day, when it seems to me that I must have been a muff, as Tod said, not to know him. But, some years had elapsed since I saw him; and those years, with their ill-fortune and exposure, and the hard life he had led in Australia, had served to change him greatly; above all, there was now the mass of hair disguising the greater part of his face. Bit by bit my recollection came to me, and I knew that he was, beyond all shadow of doubt, Fabian Pell.

How long we sat up that night at Mr. Tamlyn's, talking over its events, I cannot precisely tell. For quite the half of what was left of it. Mina, brought to his own home by Arnold for safety, was consigned to Cattledon's charge and bed, and retired to the latter in a state of humiliation and collapse.

The scene on the platform had soon come to a conclusion. With the security of Mina assured by the presence of her brother and the rest of us, Sam let go

his hold of the Captain. It had been a nice little plot this, that the Captain had set on foot in secret, and persuaded that silly girl, not much better than a child, to accede to. They were to have run away to London that night, and been married there the next day; the Captain, as was found out later, having already managed to procure a licence. You see, if Mina became his wife without any settlement, her money at once lapsed to him and he could do what he would with it. How, as Captain Collinson, he would have braved the matter out to Dr. Knox that night, and excused himself for his treachery, he best knew. Tod checkmated him by proclaiming him as Fabian Pell. A lame attempt at denial, which Tod, secure in his assertion, laughed at; a little poor bravado, and Captain Collinson collapsed. Against the truth—that he was Fabian Pell—brought home to him so suddenly and clearly, he could not hold out; the man's hardihood deserted him; and he turned tail and went off the platform, calling back that Mr. Todhetley should hear from him in the morning.

We came away then, bringing Mina. Sam went to escort Charlotte home, where they would have the pleasure of imparting the news to Mrs. Knox, who probably by that time was thinking that Lotty had eloped as well as Mina. And now we were sitting round the fire in old Tamlyn's room, discussing what

had happened. Sam came back in the midst of it. Arnold *was* down in the mouth, and no mistake.

"Did you see Mrs. Knox?" he asked of Sam.

"Not to speak to, sir. I saw her through the kitchen window. She was spreading bread-and-jam for Dicky, who had come down in his night-gown and would not be coaxed back to bed."

"What an injudicious woman she is!" put in old Tamlyn. "Enough to ruin the boy."

Perhaps Dr. Knox was thinking, as he sat there, his hand pressed upon his brow, that if she had been a less injudicious woman, a different mother altogether, Mina might not have been in danger of falling into the present escapade: but he said nothing.

"I remember hearing of the notorious break-up of the Clement-Pells at the time it took place," observed old Tamlyn to Tod. "And to think that this man should be one of them!"

"He must carry his impudence about with him," was Tod's remark.

"They ruined hundreds of poor men and women, if not thousands," continued old Tamlyn. "I conclude your people knew all about it?"

"Indeed, yes. We were in the midst of it. My father lost—how much was it, Johnny?"

"Two hundred pounds," I answered; the question bringing vividly back to me our adventures in Bou-

logne, when the Pater and Mr. Brandon went over there to try to get the money back.

"I suppose," resumed the surgeon, "your father had that much balance lying in their hands, and lost it all?"

"No," said Tod, "he did not bank with them. A day or two before Clement-Pell burst up, he drove to our house as bold as brass, asking my father in the most off-hand manner to let him have a cheque for two hundred pounds until the next day. The Squire did let him have it, without scruple, and of course lost it. He would have let him have two thousand had Pell asked for it."

"But that was a fraud. Pell might have been punished for it."

"I don't know that it was so much a fraud as many other things Pell did, and might have been punished for," observed Tod. "At any rate, not as great a one. He escaped out of the way, as I daresay you know, sir, and his family escaped with him. It was hard on them. They had been brought up in the greatest possible extravagance, in all kinds of luxury. This one, Fabian, was in the army. He, of course, had to retire. His own debts would have forced that step upon him, apart from the family disgrace."

"Did he re-enter it, I wonder."

Tod laughed. "*I* should say not. He went to Australia. Not above a year ago I heard that he was still there. He must have come back here fortune-

hunting; *bread*-hunting; and passed himself off as Captain Collinson the better to do it. Miss Mina Knox's sum of seven thousand pounds was a good prize to fight for."

"That's it!" cried Sam. "Dan has said all along it was the money he was after, dishonourable wretch, not Mina herself. He cares too much for Mme. St. Vincent to care for Mina: at least we think so. How did he get the funds, I wonder, that he has been flourishing about upon?"

"Won them at billiards," suggested Tod.

"No," said Sam, "I don't think that. By all accounts he lost more than he won in the billiard-rooms."

Dr. Knox looked up from a reverie. "Was it himself that Major Leckie saw?—and did he pass himself off as another man to escape detection? Did he go off for the remainder of the week lest the Major should look him up again?"

And we knew it must have been so.

Little sleep did I get that night, or, rather, morning, for the small hours had struck when we went to bed. The association of ideas is a great thing in this world; a help in many an emergency. This association led me from Fabian Pell to his sisters: and the mysterious memory of Madame St. Vincent that had so puzzled my mind cleared itself up. As though a veil had been withdrawn from my eyes, leaving the recollection unclouded and distinct, I saw she was one of

those sisters: the eldest of them, Martha Jane. And, let not the reader call me a muff, as Tod again did later, for not having found her out before. When I knew her she was an angular, raw-boned girl, with rather a haggard and very pale face, and nothing to say for herself. Now she was a filled-out woman, her face round, her colour healthy, and one of the most self-possessed talkers I ever listened to. In the old days her hair was reddish and fell in curls: now it was dark, and worn in braids and plaits fashionably incomprehensible. Whether the intervening years had darkened the hair, or whether Madame cunningly dyed it, must remain a question.

Dan Jenkins and his brother were right. They no doubt had seen looks of anxious interest given to Mme. St. Vincent by Captain Collinson. Not as a lover, however; they were mistaken there; but as a brother who was living in a state of peril, and whom she was doubtless protecting and trying to aid. But how far had her aid gone? That she kept up the ball, as to his being Captain Collinson, the rich, honourable, and well-connected Indian officer, went without telling, as the French say; and no one could expect her to proclaim him as Fabian Pell, the swindler; but had she been helping him in his schemes upon Mina? As to her display of formal coolness to him, it must have been put on to mislead the public.

And what was I to do? Must I quietly bury my

discovery within me and say nothing? or must I tell Dr. Knox that Madame St. Vincent was no other than Martha Jane Pell? What *ought* I to do? It was that question that kept me awake. Never liking to do harm where I could not do good, I asked myself whether I had any right to ruin her. It might be that she was not able to help herself; that she had done no worse than keep Fabian's secret: it might be that she had wanted him gone just as much as Dan Jenkins had wanted it.

"I'll tell Tod in the morning," was my final conclusion, "and hear what he thinks."

When I got downstairs they were beginning breakfast, and Miss Cattledon was turning from the table to carry up Mina's tea. Mina remained in the depths of tears and contrition, and Cattledon had graciously told her she might lie in bed. Breakfast was taken very late that morning, the result of the previous night's disturbance, and the clock was striking ten when we rose from it.

"Tod, I want to speak to you," I said in his ear. "I want to tell you something."

"All right, lad. Tell away."

"Not here. Won't you come out with me somewhere? We must be alone."

"Then it must wait, Johnny. I am going round to the stables with Tamlyn. He wishes me to see the horse they have got on trial. By the description, I

don't think much of him: should give him a pretty long trial before I bought him."

They went out. Not long after that, I was strolling across the court-yard with Sam Jenkins, who had been despatched on some professional errand, when we saw Sir Henry Westmorland ride up and rein in his horse. He asked for Dr. Knox. Sam went back to the house to say so, while Sir Henry talked to me.

"Look here," said Sir Henry to the Doctor, after they had shaken hands, "I have had a curious letter from Major Leckie this morning. At least"—taking the letter from his pocket and opening it—"it contains an odd bit of news. He says—where is it?—stand still, sir,"—to the horse. "Here it is; just listen, Doctor. 'Dr. Knox must have made a mistake in saying Collinson was at Lefford. Collinson is in India; has not been home at all. I have had a letter from him by the overland mail just in, asking me to do a commission for him. Tell Dr. Knox this. If the man he spoke of is passing himself off for Collinson of ours, he must be an impostor.' What do you think of that, Doctor?" concluded Sir Henry, folding the letter again.

"He is an impostor," replied Dr. Knox. "We found him out last night."

"What a rogue! Has he been taking people in—fleecing them?"

"He has taken us all in, Sir Henry, in one sense

of the word; he was on the point of doing it more effectually, when he was stopped. As to fleecing people, I don't know about that. He seems to have had plenty of money at his command—whence obtained is another question."

"Cheated somebody out of it; rely upon that," remarked the baronet, as he nodded a good day to us, and rode off.

Mina was downstairs when we returned indoors. Anything more pitiful than her state of contrition and distress I should not care to see. No doubt the discovery, just made, tended to enhance her repentance. In a silly girl's mind some romance might attach to the notion of an elopement with a gallant captain of consideration, brave in Her Majesty's service; but to elope with Mr. Fabian Pell, the chevalier d'industrie, was quite another affair. Mina was mild in temperament, gentle in manners, yet she might have flown at the ex-captain's face with frantic nails, had he come in her way.

"I did not really like him," she sobbed forth: and there was no question but she spoke truth. "But they were always on at me, persuading me; they never let me alone."

"Who persuaded you, my dear?" asked Janet.

"He did. He was for ever meeting me in private, and urging me. I could not go out for a walk, or just cross the garden, or run into the next door, but he

would be there. Mme. St. Vincent persuaded me. She did not say to me, in words, 'you had better do as he asks you and run away,' but all her counsels tacitly tended to it. She would say to me how happy his wife would be; what a fine position it was for any young lady lucky enough to be chosen by him; and that all the world thought me old enough to marry, though Arnold did not, and for that reason Arnold would do his best to prevent it. And so—and so——"

"And so they persuaded you against your better judgment," added Janet pityingly, as Mina broke down in a burst of sobs.

"There, child, take this, and don't cry your eyes out," interposed Cattledon, bringing in a beaten-up egg.

Cattledon was coming out uncommonly strong in the way of compassion, all her tartness gone. She certainly did not look with an eye of favour on elopements; but she was ready to take up Mina's cause against the man who deceived her. Cattledon hated the Pells: for Cattledon had been done out of fifty pounds at the time of old Pell's failure, which money she had rashly entrusted to him. She could not well afford to lose it, and she had been bitter on the Pells, one and all, ever since.

That morning was destined to be one of elucidation. Mr. Tamlyn was in the surgery, saying a last word to Dr. Knox before the latter went out to visit his patients, when Lettice Lane marched in. She

looked so fresh and innocent that three parts of Tamlyn's suspicions of her melted away.

"Anything amiss at home?" asked he.

"No, sir," replied Lettice, "I have only brought this note"—handing one in. "Mme. St. Vincent told the butler to bring it; but his pains are worse this morning; and, as I chanced to be coming out at the moment, he asked me to leave it here for him."

"Wait an instant," said Mr. Tamlyn, as he opened the note.

It contained nothing of consequence. Mme. St. Vincent had written to say that Lady Jenkins was pretty well, but had finished her medicine: perhaps Mr. Tamlyn would send her some more. Old Tamlyn's injunction to wait an instant had been given in consequence of a sudden resolution he had then come to (as he phrased it in his mind), to "tackle" Lettice.

"Lettice Lane," he began, winking at Dr. Knox, "your mistress's state is giving us concern. She seems to be always asleep."

"She is nearly always dozing off, sir," replied Lettice, her tone and looks open and honest as the day.

"Ay. I can't quite come to the bottom of it," returned old Tamlyn, making believe to be speaking confidentially. "To me, it looks just as though she took—took opiates."

"Opiates, sir?" repeated Lettice, as if she hardly understood the word: while Dr. Knox, behind the

desk, was glancing keenly at her from underneath his compressed eyebrows.

"Opium. Laudanum."

Lettice shook her head. "No, sir, my mistress does not take anything of that sort, I am sure; we have nothing of the kind in the house. But Mme. St. Vincent is for ever dosing her with brandy-and-water."

"What?" shouted old Tamlyn.

"I have said a long while, sir, that I thought you ought to know it; I've said so to the housemaid. I don't believe an hour hardly passes, day or night, but Madame administers to her a small drop of brandy-and-water. Half a wine glass, may be, or a full wine glass, as the case may happen; and sometimes I know it's pretty strong."

"That's it," said Dr. Knox quietly: and a curious smile crossed his face.

Mr. Tamlyn sat down on the stool in consternation. "Brandy-and-water!" he repeated, more than once. "Perpetually dosed with brandy-and-water! And now, Lettice Lane, how is it you have not come here before to tell me of this?"

"I did not come to tell you now, sir," returned Lettice. "Mme. St. Vincent says that Lady Jenkins needs it: she seems to give it her for her good. It is only lately that I have doubted whether it can be right. I have not liked to say anything: servants don't care to interfere. Ten times a day she will give her

these drops of cold brandy-and-water: and I know she gets up for the same purpose once or twice in the night."

"Does Lady Jenkins take it without remonstrance?" asked Dr. Knox, speaking for the first time.

"She does, sir, now. At first she did not. Many a time I have heard my lady say, 'Do you think so much brandy can be good for me, Patty; I feel so dull after it,' and Mme. St. Vincent has replied to her, that it is the only thing that can get her strength back and bring her round."

"The jade!" spoke Dr. Knox, between his teeth. "And to assure us both that all the old lady took was a drop of it weak twice a day at her meals! Lettice Lane," he added aloud, and there was a great sternness in his tone, "you are to blame for not having spoken of this. A little longer silence, and it might have cost your mistress her life." And Lettice went out in contrition.

"What can the woman's motive be, for thus dosing her into stupidity?" spoke the one doctor to the other when they were shut in together.

"*That:* the dosing her into it," said Dr. Knox.

"But the motive, Arnold?—the reason? She must have had a motive."

"That remains to be found out."

It turned out to be too true. The culprit was Mme. St. Vincent. She had been administering these

constant doses of brandy-and-water for months. Not giving enough at a time to put Lady Jenkins into a state of intoxication; only to reduce her to a chronic state of semi-stupidity.

Tod called me, as I tell you, a muff, and a double muff—first for not knowing Mme. St. Vincent; and next for thinking to screen her. Of course this revelation of Lettice Lane's had put a new complexion upon things. I left the matter with Tod, and he told the doctors at once: Mme. St. Vincent was, or used to be, Martha Jane Pell, own sister to Captain Collinson the false.

III.

QUIETLY knocking at the door of Jenkins House on this same sunny morning went three gentlemen: old Tamlyn, Mr. Lawrence, and Joseph Todhetley. Mr. Lawrence was a magistrate and ex-mayor; he had preceded the late Sir Daniel Jenkins in the civic chair, and was intimate with him as a brother. Just as old Tamlyn tackled Lettice, so they were now about to tackle Mme. St. Vincent on the score of the brandy-and-water; and they had deemed it advisable to take Tod with them.

Lady Jenkins was better than usual; rather less stupid. She was seated with Madame in the cheerful garden-room, its glass doors standing open to the sunshine and the flowers. The visitors were cordially

received; it was supposed they had but come to pay a morning visit. Madame St. Vincent sat behind a table in the corner, writing notes of invitation for a soirée, to be held that day week. Tod, who had his wits about him, went straight up to her. It must be remembered that they had not yet met.

"Ah! how are you?" cried he, holding out his hand. "Surprised to see you here." And she turned white, and stared, uncertain how to take his words, or whether he had really recognized her, and bowed stiffly as to a stranger, and never put out her own hand in answer.

I cannot tell you much about the interview: Tod's account to me was not very clear. Lady Jenkins began talking about Captain Collinson—that he had turned out to be some unworthy man of the name of Pell, and had endeavoured to kidnap poor little Mina. Charlotte Knox imparted the news to her that morning, in defiance of Madame St. Vincent, who had tried to prevent her. Madame had said it must be altogether some mistake, and that no doubt Captain Collinson would be able to explain: but she, Lady Jenkins, did not know. After that there was a pause; Lady Jenkins shut her eyes, and Madame went on writing her notes.

It was old Tamlyn who opened the ball. He drew his chair nearer the old lady, and spoke out without circumlocution.

"What is this that we hear about your taking so much brandy-and-water?"

"Eh?" cried the old lady, opening her eyes. Madame paused in her writing, and looked up. Tamlyn waited for an answer.

"Lady Jenkins does not take much brandy-and-water," cried Madame.

"I am speaking to Lady Jenkins, madam," returned old Tamlyn, severely: "be so kind as not to interfere. My dear lady, listen to me"—taking her hand; "I am come here with your life-long old friend, William Lawrence, to talk to you. We have reason to believe that you continually take, and have taken for some time past, small doses of brandy-and-water. Is it so?"

"Patty gives it me," cried Lady Jenkins, looking first at them and then at Patty, in a helpless kind of manner.

"Just so: we know she does. But, are you aware that brandy-and-water, taken in this way, is so much poison?"

"Tell them, Patty, that you give it me for my good," said the poor lady, in affectionate appeal.

"Yes, it is for your good, dear Lady Jenkins," resentfully affirmed Madame St. Vincent, regarding the company with flashing eyes. "Does any one dare to suppose that I should give Lady Jenkins enough to hurt her? I may be allowed, I presume, as her lady-

ship's close companion, constantly watching her, to be the best judge of what is proper for her to take."

Well, there ensued a shindy—as Tod called it—all of them talking together, except himself and poor Lady Jenkins: and Madame defying everybody and everything. They told her that she could no longer be trusted with Lady Jenkins; that she must go out of the house that day; and when Madame defied this with a double defiance, the magistrate intimated that he had come up to enforce the measure, if necessary, and he meant to stay there until she was gone.

She saw it was serious then, and the defiant tone changed. "What I have given Lady Jenkins has been for her good," she said; "to do her good. But for being supported by a little brandy-and-water, the system could never have held out after that serious attack she had in Boulogne. I have prolonged her life."

"No, madam, you have been doing your best to shorten her life," corrected old Tamlyn. "A little brandy-and-water, as you term it, might have been good for her while she was recovering her strength, but you have gone beyond the little; you have made her life a perpetual lethargy; you would shortly have killed her. What your motive was, Heaven knows."

"My motive was a kind one," flashed Madame. "Out of this house I will not go."

So, upon that, they played their trump card, and

informed Lady Jenkins, who was crying softly, that this lady was the sister of the impostor, Collinson. The very helplessness, the utter docility to which the treatment had reduced her, prevented her expressing (and most probably feeling) any dissent. She yielded passively to all, like a child, and told Patty that she must go, as her old friends said so.

A bitter pill for Madame to take. But she could not help herself.

"You will be as well as ever in a little time," Tamlyn said to Lady Jenkins. "You would have died, had this gone on: it must have induced some malady or other from which you could not have rallied."

Madame St. Vincent went out of the house that afternoon, and Cattledon entered it. She had offered herself to Lady Jenkins for a few days in the emergency.

It was, perhaps, curious that I should meet Madame St. Vincent before she left the town. Janet was in trouble over a basket of butter and fowls that had been sent her by one of the country patients, and of which the railway people denied the arrival. I went again to the station in the afternoon to see whether they had news of it: and there, seated on the platform bench, her boxes around her, and waiting for the London train, was Madame.

I showed myself as respectful to her as ever, for

you can't humiliate fallen people to their faces, telling her, in the pleasantest way I could, that I was sorry things had turned out so. The tone seemed to tell upon her, and she burst into tears. I never saw a woman so subdued in the space of a few hours.

"I have been treated shamefully, Johnny Ludlow," she said, gulping down her sobs. "Day and night for the past nine months have I been about Lady Jenkins, wearing myself out in attendance on her. The poor old lady had learnt to love me and to depend upon me. I was like a daughter to her."

"I daresay," I answered, conveniently ignoring the dosing.

"And what I gave her, I gave her for the best," went on Madame. "It *was* for the best. People of seventy years need it. Their nerves and system require to be soothed: to induce sleep now and then must be a boon. It was a boon to her, poor old thing. And this is my recompense!—turned from the house like a dog!"

"It does seem hard."

"Seem! It *is*. I have had nothing but hardships all my life," she continued, lifting her veil to wipe away the tears. "Where I am to go now, or how make a living, I know not. They told me I need not apply to Lady Jenkins for references: and ladies won't engage a companion who has none."

"Is your husband really dead?" I ventured to ask.

"My poor husband is really dead, Johnny Ludlow —I don't know why you should imply a doubt of it. He left me nothing: he had nothing to leave. He was only a master in the college at Brétage—a place in the South of France—and he died, I verily believe, of poor living. We had not been married twelve months. I had a little baby, and that died. Oh, I assure you I have had my troubles."

"How are—Mr. and Mrs. Clement-Pell?" I next asked, with hesitation. "And Conny?—and the rest of them?"

"Oh, they were well when I last heard," she answered, slightingly. "I don't hear often. Foreign letters are expensive. Conny was to have come here shortly on a visit."

"Where is Gusty? Is——"

"I know nothing at all about my brothers," she interrupted sharply. "And this, I suppose, is my train. Good-bye, Johnny Ludlow; you and I at least can part friends. You are always kind. I wish the world was like you."

I saw her into the carriage—first-class—and her boxes into the van. And thus she disappeared from Lefford. And her brother, "Captain Collinson," as we found later, had taken his departure for London by an early morning train, telling little Pink, his landlord, as he paid his week's rent, that he was going up to attend a levee.

It was found that the rumour of his engagement to Miss Belmont was entirely untrue. Miss Belmont was rather indignant about it, freely saying that she was ten years his senior. He had never hinted at such a thing to her, and she should have stopped him if he had. We concluded that the report had been set afloat by himself, to take attention from his pursuit of Mina Knox.

Madame St. Vincent had feathered her nest. As the days went on, and Lady Jenkins grew clearer, better able to see a little into matters, she could not at all account for the money that had been drawn from the bank. Cheque after cheque had been presented and cashed; and not one-tenth of the money could have been spent upon home expenses. Lady Jenkins had been always signing cheques; she remembered that much; never so much as asking, in her abnegation of will, what they were needed for. "I want a cheque to-day, dear Lady Jenkins," her companion would say, producing the cheque-book from her desk; and Lady Jenkins would docilely sign it. That a large portion of the proceeds had found their way to Mr. Fabian Pell was looked upon as a certainty.

And hence, the obtaining of this money, might be traced the motive for the dosing of Lady Jenkins. Once let her intellect become clear, her will re-assert itself, and the game would be stopped. Madame St.

Vincent had also another scheme in her head—for the past month or two she had been trying to persuade Lady Jenkins to make a codicil to her will, leaving her a few thousand pounds. Lady Jenkins might have fallen blindly into that; but they had not as yet been able to agree upon the details: Madame St. Vincent urging that a lawyer should be called in from a distance; Lady Jenkins clinging to old Belford. That this codicil would have been made in time, and by the strange lawyer, there existed no manner of doubt.

Ah, well: it was a deep-laid plot altogether. And my visit to Lefford, with Tod's later one, had served, under heaven, to frustrate it.

Lady Jenkins grew rapidly better, now that she was no longer drugged. In a few days she was herself again. Cattledon came out amazingly strong in the way of care and kindness, and was gracious to everybody, even to Lettice.

"She always forbade me to say that I took the brandy-and-water," Lady Jenkins said to me one day when I was sitting with her under the laburnum tree on her lawn, talking of the past, her bright green silk dress and pink cap ribbons shining in the sun. "She made my will hers. In other respects she was as kind as she could be to me."

"That must have been part of her plan," I answered. "It was the great kindness that won you to her. After that, she took care that you should have no will."

"And the poor thing might have been so happy with me had she only chosen to be straightforward, and not tried to play tricks! I gave her a handsome salary, and new gowns besides; and I don't suppose I should have forgotten her at my death."

"Well, it is all over, dear Lady Jenkins, and you will be just as hearty and brisk as you used to be."

"Not quite that, Johnny," she said, shaking her head; "I cannot expect that. At seventy, grim old age is laying its hand upon us. What we need then, my dear," she added, turning her kindly blue eyes upon me, in which the tears were gathering, "is to go to the mill to be ground young again. And that is a mill that does not exist in this world."

"Ah no!"

"I thank God for the mercy He has shown me," she continued, the tears trickling down her cheeks. "I might have gone to the grave in the half-witted state to which I was reduced. And, Johnny, I often wonder, as I lie awake at night thinking, whether I should have been held responsible for it."

The first use Lady Jenkins made of her liberty was to invite all her relations, the young nephews and nieces, up to dinner, as she used to do. Madame St. Vincent had set her face against these family entertainments, and they had fallen through. The ex-mayor, William Lawrence, and his good old wife, made part of the company, as did Dr. Knox and Janet. Lady

Jenkins beamed on them once more from her place at the head of the table, and Tamlyn sat at the foot and served the big plum-pudding.

"Never more, I trust, shall I be estranged from you, my dears, until it pleases Heaven to bring about the final estrangement," she said to the young people when they were leaving. And she gave them all a sovereign a-piece.

Cattledon could not remain on for ever. Miss Deveen wanted her: so Mina Knox went to stay at Jenkins House, until a suitable lady should be found to replace Madame St. Vincent. Upon that, Dan Jenkins was taken with an anxious solicitude for his aunt's health, and was for ever finding his way up to enquire after it.

"You will never care to notice me again, Dan," Mina said to him, with a swelling heart and throat, one day when he was tilting himself by her on the arm of the sofa.

"Shan't I!" returned Dan.

"Oh, I am so ashamed of my folly; I feel more ashamed of it, day by day," cried Mina, bursting into tears. "I shall never, never get over the mortification."

"Won't you!" added Dan.

"And I never liked him much: I think I *dis*-liked him. At first I did dislike him; only he kept saying how fond he was of me; and Mme. St. Vincent was

always praising him up. And you know he was all the fashion."

"Quite so," assented Dan.

"Don't you think it would be almost as well if I were dead, Dan—for all the use I am likely to be of to any one?"

"Almost, perhaps; not quite," laughed Dan; and he suddenly stooped and kissed her.

That's all. And now, at the time I write this, Dan Jenkins is a flourishing lawyer at Lefford, and Mina is his wife. Little feet totter up and down the staircase and along the passages that good old Lady Jenkins used to tread. She treads them no more. There was no mill to grind her young again here; but she is gone to that better land where such mills are not needed.

Her will was a just one. She left her property between her nephews and nieces; a substantial sum to each of them. Dan had Jenkins House in addition. But it is no longer Jenkins House; for he had that name taken off the entrance pillars forthwith, replacing it with the one that had been there before—Rose Bank.

THE ANGELS' MUSIC.

NETTIE.

I.

How the Squire came to give in to it, was beyond the ken of mortal man. Tod turned crusty; called the young ones all the hard names in the dictionary, and said he should go out for the night. But he did not.

"Just like her!" cried he, with a fling at Mrs. Todhetley. "Always devising some rubbish or other to gratify the little reptiles!"

The "little reptiles" applied to the school children at North Crabb. They generally had a treat at Christmas; and this year Mrs. Todhetley said she would like it to be given by us, at Crabb Cot, if the Squire did not object to stand the evening's uproar. After vowing for a day that he'd not hear of it, the Squire (to our astonishment) gave in, and said they might come. It was only the girls: the boys had their treat later, when they could go in for out-of-door sports. After the Pater's concession, she and the school-mistress, Miss Timmens, were as busy plan-

ning-out the arrangements as two bees in a honey-suckle garden.

The evening fixed was the last in the old year—a Thursday. And the preparations seemed to me to be in full flow from the previous Monday. Molly made her plum-cakes and loaves on the Wednesday; on the Thursday after breakfast, her mistress went to the kitchen to help her with the savoury small pork-pies and the tartlets. To judge by the quantity provided, the school would require nothing more for a week to come.

The Squire went over to Islip on some matter of business, taking Tod with him. Our children, Hugh and Lena, were spending the day with the little Letsoms, who would come back with them for the treat; so we had the house to ourselves. The white deal ironing-board under the kitchen window was raised on its iron legs; before it stood Mrs. Todhetley and Molly, busy with the mysteries of pastry-making and patty-pan filling. I sat on the edge of the board, looking on. The savoury pies were done, and in the act of baking, a tray-load at a time; every now and then Molly darted into the back kitchen, where the oven was, to look after them. For two days the snow had come down thickly; it was falling still in great flakes; far and near, the ground and landscape showed white and bright.

"Johnny, if you will persist in eating the jam, I shall have to send you away."

"Put the jar on the other side then, good mother."

"Ugh! Much jam Master Johnny would leave for the tarts, let him have his way," struck in Molly, more crusty than her own pastry, when I declare I had only dipped the wrong end of the fork in three or four times. The jam was not hers.

"Mind you don't give the young ones bread-and-scrape, Molly," I retorted, catching sight of no end of butter-pats through the open door. At which advice she only threw up her head.

"Who is this, coming up through the snow?" cried the Mater.

I turned to the window and made it out to be Mrs. Trewin: a meek little woman who had seen better days, and tried to get her living as a dressmaker since the death of her husband. She had not been good for very much since: seemed never quite to get over the shock. Going out one morning, as usual, to his duties as an office clerk, he was brought home dead. Killed by an accident. It was eighteen months ago now, but Mrs. Trewin wore deep mourning still.

Not standing upon ceremony down in our country, Mrs. Todhetley had her brought into the kitchen, going on with the tartlets all the same, while she talked. Mrs. Trewin was making a frock for Lena, and had come up to say that the trimming ran short.

The Mater told her she was too busy to see to it then, and was very sorry she had come through the snow for such a trifle.

"'Twas not much further, ma'am," was her answer: "I had to go out to the school to fetch home Nettie. The path is so slippery, through the boys making slides, that I don't altogether like to trust the child to go to and fro to school by herself."

"As if Nettie would come to any harm, Mrs. Trewin!" I put in. "If she went down, it would only be a Christmas gambol."

"Accidents happen so unexpectedly, sir," she answered, a shadow passing over her sad face. And I was sorry to have said it: it had put her in mind of her husband.

"You are coming up this evening, you know, Mrs. Trewin," said mother. "Don't be late."

"It is very good of you to have asked me, ma'am," she answered gratefully. "I said so to Miss Timmens. I'm sure it will be something new to have such a treat. Nettie, poor child, will enjoy it too."

Molly came banging in with a tray of pork pies, just out of the oven. The Mater told Mrs. Trewin to take one, and offered her a glass of beer.

But, instead of eating the pie, she wrapped it in paper to take with her home, and declined the beer, lest it should give her a headache for the evening.

So Mrs. Trewin took her departure; and, under cover of it, I helped myself to another of the pork-pies. Weren't they good! After that the morning went on again, and the tart-making with it.

The last of the paste was being used up, the last of the jam jars stood open, and the clock told us that it was getting on for one, when we had another visitor: Miss Timmens, the schoolmistress. She came in, stamping the snow from her shoes on the mat, her thin figure clad in an old long cloth cloak, and the chronic red in her face turned purple.

"My word! It is a day, ma'am, this is!" she exclaimed.

"And what have you come through it for?" asked Mrs. Todhetley. "About the forms? Why, I sent word to you by Luke Mackintosh that they would be fetched at two o'clock."

"He never came, then," said Miss Timmens, irate at Luke's negligence. "That Mackintosh is not worth his salt. —— What delicious-looking tartlets!" exclaimed she, as she sat down. "And what a lot of them!"

"Try one," said the mother. "Johnny, hand them to Miss Timmens, and a plate."

"That silly Sarah Trewin has gone and tumbled down," cried Miss Timmens, as she thanked me and took the plate and one of the tartlets. "Went and

slipped upon a slide near the school-house. How delicious this tart is!"

"Sarah Trewin!" cried the Mater, turning round from the board. "Why, she was here an hour ago. Has she hurt herself?"

"Just bruised all the one side of her black and blue, from her shoulder to her ankle," answered Miss Timmens. "Those unruly boys have made slides all over the place, ma'am; and Sarah Trewin must needs go down upon one, not looking, I suppose, to her feet. She had but just turned out of the school-room with Nettie."

"Dear, dear! And she is so unable to bear a fall!"

"Of course it might have been worse, for there are no bones broken," remarked Miss Timmens. "As to Nettie, the child was nearly frightened out of her senses; she's sobbing and crying still. Never was such a timid child as that."

"Will Sarah Trewin be able to come this evening?"

"Not she, ma'am. She'll be as stiff as buckram for days to come. I'd like to pay out those boys—making their slides on the pathway and endangering people's lives! Nichol's not half strict enough with them; and I'm tired of telling him so. Tiresome, rude monkeys! Not that my girls are a degree better: they'd go down all the slides in the parish, let 'em

have their way. What with them, and what with these fantastical notions of the new parson, I'm sure my life's a martyrdom."

The mother smiled over her pastry. Miss Timmens and the parson, civilly polite to one another, were mentally at daggers drawn.

The time I am writing of was before the movement, set in of later years, for giving the masses the same kind of education as their betters; but our new parson at Crabb was before his age in these ideas. To experienced Miss Timmens, and to a great many more clear-sighted people, the best word that could be given to the movement was "fantastical."

"He came in yesterday afternoon at dusk," she resumed, "when I was holding my Bible Class. 'And what has been the course of instruction to-day, Miss Timmens?' asked he, as mild as new milk, all the girls gaping and staring around him. 'It has been reading, and writing, and summing, and spelling, and sewing,' said I, giving him the catalogue in full: 'and now I'm trying to teach them their duty to Heaven and to one another. And according to my old-fashioned notion, sir,' I summed up, 'if a poor girl acquires these matters thoroughly, she is a deal more fitted to go through life in the station to which God has called her (as the catechism says), than she would be if you gave her a course of fine mincing uppishness, with

your poetry and your drawing and your embroidery.' Oh, he gets his answer from me, ma'am."

"Mr. Bruce may be kind and enlightened, and all that," spoke Mrs. Todhetley, "but he certainly seems inclined to carry his ideas beyond reasonable bounds, so far as regards these poor peasant children."

"Reasonable!" repeated Miss Timmens, catching at the word, and rubbing her thin sharp nose with excitement: "why, the worst is, that there's no reason in it. Not a jot. The parson's mind has gone a little bit off its balance, ma'am; that's my firm conviction. This exalted education applied to young ladies would be all right and proper: but where can be the use of it to these poor girls? What good will his accomplishments, his branches of grand learning do them? His conchology and meteorology, and all the rest of his ologies? Of what service will it be to them in future?"

"I'd have got my living nicely, I guess, if I'd been taught them things," satirically struck in Molly, unable to keep her tongue still any longer. "A fine cook I should ha' made!—kept all my places a beautiful length of time; I'd not come with such flighty talk to the Squire's, Miss Timmens, if 'twas me."

"The talk's other people's; 'tisn't mine," fired Miss Timmens, turning her wrath on Molly. "That is, the notions are. You had better attend to your baking, Molly."

"So I had," said Molly. "Baking's more in my line than them other foreign jerks. But well I should have knowed how to do it if my mind had been cocketed up with the learning that's fit for lords and ladies."

"Is not that my argument?" retorted Miss Timmens, flinging the last word after her as she went out to her oven. "Poor girls were sent into the world to work, ma'am, not to play at being fine scholars," she added to Mrs. Todhetley, as she got up to leave. "And, as sure as we are born, this new dodge of education, if it ever gets a footing, will turn the country upside down."

"I'm sure I hope not," replied the mother in her mild way. "Take another tart, Miss Timmens. These are currant and raspberry."

II.

THE company began to arrive at four o'clock. The snow had ceased to fall; it was a fine, cold, clear evening, the moon very bright. A large store-room at the back of the house had been cleared out, and a huge fire made in it. The walls were decorated with evergreens, and tin sconces holding candles; benches from the school-house were ranged underneath them. This was to be the principal play-place, but the other rooms were open. Mrs. Hill (formerly Mrs. Garth,

who had not so very long before lost poor David) and Maria Lease came up by invitation to help Miss Timmens with the children; and Mrs. Trewin would have come but for her fall on the slide. Miss Timmens appeared in full feather: a purple gown of shot silk, with a red waist-band, and red holly berries in her lace cap. The children, timid at first, sat round on the forms in prim stillness, just like so many mice who feared to have their heads snapped off by the cat.

By far the most timid of all was a gentle little thing of seven years old, got up like a lady; white frock, black sash and sleeve ribbons, pretty white socks and low shoes. She was delicate-featured, blue-eyed, had curling flaxen hair. It was Nettie Trewin. Far superior she looked to all of them; out of place, in fact, amid so many coarser natures. Her little arm and hand trembled as she clung to Miss Timmens' gown.

"Senseless little thing," cried Miss Timmens, "to be afraid in a beautiful room like this, and with all these kind friends around her! Would you believe it, Mr. Johnny, that I could hardly get her here? Afraid, she said, to come without mother!"

"Oh, Nettie! Why, you are going to have lots of fun! Is mother better this evening?"

"Yes," whispered Nettie, venturing to take a peep at me through her wet eyelashes.

The order of the day was this. Tea at once, consisting of as much bread and butter and plum cake as they could eat; games afterwards. The savoury pies and tartlets later; more cake to wind up with, which, if they had no room for, they might carry home.

After all signs of the tea had disappeared, and our neighbours, the Coneys, had come in, and several round rings were seated on the floor at "Hunt-the-Slipper," I, chancing to draw within earshot, found Miss Timmens had opened out her grievance to the Squire—the interference of the parson with the school.

"It would be reversing the proper and natural order of things, as *I* look upon it," she was saying, "to give an exalted education to those who must get their living by the sweat of their hands and brow; as servants, and what not. Do you think so, sir?"

"Think so! of course I think so," spluttered the Squire, taking up the subject hotly as usual. "It's good for them to read and write well, to add up figures, and know how to sew, and clean, and wash, and iron. That's the learning they want, whether they are to pass their lives serving in families, or as the wives of working men."

"Yes, sir," acquiesced Miss Timmens, in a glow of satisfaction, "but you may as well try to beat common sense into a broomstick as into Mr. Bruce. The other day—what, is it you again, Nettie!" she broke

off, as the little white-robed child sidled up and hid her head in what appeared to be her haven of refuge —the folds of the purple gown. "Never was such a child as this, for shyness. When put to play with the rest, she'll not stay with them. What do you think you are good for?"—rather wrathfully. "Do you suppose the gentlefolk are going to eat you, Nettie?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of, little lassie. What child is it?" added the Squire, struck with her appearance.

"Tell your name to the Squire," said Miss Timmens, with authority. And the little one lifted her pretty blue eyes appealingly to his face, as if beseeching him not to bite her.

"It's Nettie Trewin, sir," she said in a whisper.

"Dear me! Is that poor Trewin's child! She has a look of her father too. A delicate little maid."

"And silly also," added Miss Timmens. "You came here to play, you know, Nettie; not hide your face. What are they all stirring at, now? Oh, going to have 'Puss in the Corner.' You can play at that, Nettie. Here, Jane Bright! Take Nettie with you and attend to her. Find her a corner: she has not had any play at all."

A tall, awkward girl stepped up: slouching shoulders, narrow forehead, stolid features, coarse hair all ruffled; thick legs, thick boots——Miss Jane Bright. She seized Nettie's hand.

"Yes, sir, you are right: the child is a delicate, dainty little thing, quite a contrast to most of these other girls," resumed Miss Timmens, in answer to the Squire. "Look at that one who has just fetched Nettie away: she is only a type of the rest. They come, most of them, of coarse, stupid parents, and will be no better to the end of the chapter, whatever education you may try to hammer into them. As I said to Mr. Bruce the other day when—Well, I never! There he is!"

The young parson caught her eye, as he was looming in. Long coat, clerical waistcoat, no white tie to speak of round his bare neck; quite à la mode. The new fashions and the new notions that Mr. Bruce went in for, were not at all understood at North Crabb.

The Squire had gone on at first against the party; but no face was more sunshiny than his, now that he was in the thick of it. A select few of the children, with ours and the little Lawsons, had appropriated the dining-room for "Hunt the Whistle." The Pater chanced to look in just before it began, and we got him to be the hunter. I shall never forget it as long as I live. I don't believe I had ever laughed as much before. He did not know the play, or the trick of it: and to see him whirling himself about in search of the whistle as it was blown behind his back, now seizing on this bold whistler, believing he or she must be in possession of the whistle, and now on that one,

all unconscious that the whistle was fastened to the back button of his own coat; and to look at the puzzled wonder of his face as to where the whistle could possibly be, and how it contrived to elude his grasp, was something to be remembered. The shrieks of laughter might have been heard down at the Ravine. Tod had to sit on the floor and hold his sides; Tom Coney was in convulsions.

"Ah—I—ah—what do you think, Mr. Todhetley," began Bruce, with his courteous drawl, catching the Squire, as he emerged later, red and steaming, from the whistle-hunt. "Suppose I collect these young ones around me and give them a quarter of an hour's lecture on pneumatics? I've been getting up the subject a little."

"Pneumatics be hanged!" burst forth the Pater, more emphatically than politely, when he had taken a puzzled stare at the parson. "The young ones have come here to *play*, not to have their brains addled. Be shot if I quite know myself what 'pneumatics' means. I beg your pardon, Bruce. You mean well, I know."

"Pneumatics!" repeated old Coney, taking time to digest the word. "Don't you think, parson, that's more in the department of the Astronomer Royal?"

One required a respite after the whistle-hunt. I put my back against the wall in the large room, and watched the different sets of long tails, then pulling

fiercely at "Oranges and Lemons." Mrs. Hill and Maria Lease sat side by side on one of the benches, both of them looking as sad as might be, their memories, no doubt, buried in the past. Maria Lease had never, so to say, worn a smiling countenance since the dreadful end of Daniel Ferrar.

A commotion! Half a dozen of the "lemons," pulling too fiercely, had come to grief on the ground. Maria went to the rescue.

"I was just thinking of poor David, sir," Mrs. Hill said to me, with a sigh. "How he would have enjoyed this scene: so merry and bright!"

"But he is in a brighter scene than this, you know."

"Yes, Master Johnny, I do know it," she said, tears trickling slowly down her cheeks. "Where he is, all things are beautiful."

In her palmy days Mrs. Todhetley used to sing a song, of which this was the first verse:—

"All that's bright must fade,
The brightest still the fleetest;
All that's sweet was made
But to be lost when sweetest."

Mrs. Hill's words brought this song to my memory, and with it the damping reminder that nothing lasts in this world, whether of pleasure or brightness. All things must fade, or die: but in that better life to

come they will last for ever. And David had entered upon it.

"Now, where's that senseless little Nettie?"

The words, spoken sharply, came from Miss Timmens. But if she did possess a sharp-toned tongue, she was good and kind at heart. The young crew were sitting down at the long table to the savoury pies and tartlets; Miss Timmens, taking stock of them, missed Nettie.

"Jane Bright, go and find Nettie Trewin."

Not daring to disobey the curt command, but looking as though she feared her portion of the good things would be eaten up during her absence, Jane Bright disappeared. Back she came in a brace of shakes, saying Nettie "was not there."

"Maria Lease, where's Nettie Trewin?" asked Miss Timmens.

Maria turned from the table. "Nettie Trewin?" she repeated, looking about her. "I don't know. She must be somewhere or other."

"I wish to goodness you'd find her then."

Maria Lease could not see anything of the child. "Nettie Trewin" was called out high and low; but it brought forth no response. The servants were sent to look over the house, with no better result.

"She is hiding somewhere in her shyness," said

Miss Timmens. "I have a great mind to punish her for this."

"She can't have got into the rain-water butt?" suggested the Squire. "Molly, you go and look."

It was not very likely: the barrel was quite six feet high. But, as the Squire once got into the water-butt to hide himself when he was a climbing youngster, and had reasons for anticipating a whipping, his thoughts naturally flew to it.

"Well, she must be somewhere," cried he when we laughed at him. "She could not sink through the floor."

"Who saw her last?" repeated Miss Timmens. "Do you hear, children? Just stop eating for a minute, and answer."

Much discussion—doubt—cross-questioning. The whole lot seemed to be nearly as stupid as owls. At last, so far as could be gathered, none of them had noticed Nettie since they began Puss-in-the-corner.

"Jane Bright, I told you to take Nettie to play with the rest, and to find her a corner. What did you do with her?"

Jane Bright commenced her answer by essaying to take a surreptitious bite of her pie. Miss Timmens stopped her midway, and turned her from the table to face the company.

"Do you hear me? Now don't stand staring like a regular gaby! Just answer."

Like a "regular gaby" did Jane Bright stand: mouth wide open, eyes round, countenance bewildered.

"Please, governess, I didn't do nothing with her."

"You must have done something with her: you held her hand."

"I didn't do nothing," repeated the girl, shaking her head stolidly.

"Now, that won't do, Jane Bright. Where did you leave her?"

"'Twas in the corner," answered Jane Bright, apparently making desperate efforts of memory. "When I was Puss, and runned across and came back again, I didn't see her there."

"Surely, the child has not stolen out by herself and run off home!" cried Mrs. Coney: and the schoolmistress took up the suggestion.

"It is the very thought that has been in my mind the last minute or two," avowed she. "Yes, Mrs. Coney, that's it, depend upon it. She has decamped through the snow and gone back to her mother's."

"Then she has gone without her things," interposed Maria Lease, who was entering the room with a little black cloak and bonnet in her hand. "Are not these Nettie's things, children?" And a dozen voices all speaking together, hastened to say Yes, they were Nettie's.

"Then she must be in the house," decided Miss

Timmens. "She'd not be silly enough to go out this cold night with her neck and arms bare. The child has her share of sense. She has run away to hide herself, and may have dropped asleep."

"It must be in the chimbleys, then," cried free Molly from the back of the room. "We've looked everywhere else."

"You had better look again," said the Squire. "Take plenty of light—two or three candles."

It seemed rather a queer thing. And, while this talking had been going on, there flashed into my mind the old Modena story, related by the poet Rogers, of the lovely young heiress of the Donatis: and which has been embodied in our song "The Mistletoe Bough." Could this timid child have fastened herself down in any place that she was unable to get out of? Going to the kitchen for a candle, I went upstairs, taking the garret first, with its boxes and lumber, and then the rooms. And nowhere could I find the least trace or sign of Nettie.

Stepping into the kitchen to leave the candle, there stood Luke Mackintosh, whiter than death; his back propped against Molly's press, his hands trembling, his hair raised up on end. Tod stood in front of him suppressing his laughter. Mackintosh had just burst in at the back door in a desperate state of fright, declaring he had seen a ghost.

It's not the first time I have mentioned the man's

cowardice. Believing in ghosts and goblins, wraiths and witches, he could hardly be persuaded to cross Crabb Ravine at night, on account of the light sometimes seen there. Sensible people told him that this light (which, it was true, nobody had ever traced to its source) was nothing but a Will-o'-the-wisp, an ignis-fatuus arising from the vapour; but Luke could not be brought to reason. On this evening it chanced that the Squire had occasion to send Mackintosh to the Timberdale post-office, and the man had now just come in from the errand.

"I see the light, too, sir," he was saying to Tod in a scared voice, as he ran his quaking hand through his hair. "It be dodging about on the banks of the Ravine for all the world like a corpse-candle. Well, sir, I didn't like that, and I got up out of the Ravine as fast as my legs would bring me, and were making straight for home here, with my head down'ards, not wanting to see nothing more, when something dreadful met me. All in white, it was."

"A man in his shroud, who had left his grave to take a moonlight walk," said Tod, gravely, biting his lips.

"'Twere in grave-clothes, for sure; a long, white garment, whiter than the snow. I'd not say but it was Daniel Ferrar," added Luke, in the low dread tone that befitted the dismal subject. "His ghost do walk, you know, sir."

"And where did his ghost go to?"

"Blest if I saw, sir," replied Mackintosh, shaking his head. "I'd not have looked after it for all the world. 'Twarn't a slow pace I come at, over the field, after that, and right inside this here house."

"Rushing like the wind, I suppose."

"My heart was all a-throbbing and a skeering. Mr. Joseph, I *hope* the Squire won't send me through the Ravine after dark again! I couldn't stand it, sir; I'd a'most rather give up my place."

"You'll not be fit for this place, or any other, I should say, Mackintosh, if you let this kind of fear run away with your senses," I put in. "You saw nothing; it was all fancy."

"Saw nothing!" repeated Mackintosh in the excess of injured desperation. "Why, Mr. Johnny, I never saw a sight plainer in all my born days. A great, white, awesome apparition it were, that went rushing past me with a wailing sound. I hope you won't ever have the ill-luck to see such a thing yourself, sir."

"I'm sure I sha'n't."

"What's to do here?" asked Tom Coney, putting in his head.

"Mackintosh has seen a ghost."

"Seen a ghost!" cried Tom, beginning to grin.

Mackintosh, trembling yet, entered afresh on the recital, rather improving it by borrowing Tod's mocking suggestion. "A dead man in his shroud come out walking from his grave in the churchyard—which he

feared might be Ferrar, lying on the edge on't, just beyond consecrated ground. I never could abear to go by the spot where he was put in, and never a prayer said over him, Mr. Tom!"

But, in spite of the solemnity of the subject, touching Ferrar, Tom Coney could but have his laugh out. The servants came in from their fruitless search of the dairy and cellars, and started to see the state of Mackintosh.

"Give him a cup of warm ale, Molly," was Tod's command. And we left them gathered round the man, listening to his tale with open mouths.

From the fact that Nettie Trewin was certainly not in the house, one only deduction could be drawn —that the timid child had run home to her mother. Bare-headed, bare-necked, bare-armed, she had gone through the snow; and, as Miss Timmens expressed it, might just have caught her death.

"Senseless little idiot!" exclaimed Miss Timmens in a passion. "Sarah Trewin is sure to blame me; she'll say I might have taken better care of her."

But one of the elder girls, named Emma Stone, whose recollection only appeared to come to her when digesting her supper, spoke up at this juncture, and declared that long after Puss-in-the-corner was over, and also Oranges and Lemons, which had succeeded it, she had seen and spoken to Nettie Trewin. Her account was, that in crossing the passage leading from

the store-room, she saw Nettie "scrouged against the wall, half-way down the passage, like anybody afeared of being seen."

"Did you speak to her, Emma Stone?" asked Miss Timmens, after listening to these concluding words.

"Yes, governess. I asked her why she was not at play, and why she was hiding there."

"Well, what did she say?"

"Not anything," replied Emma Stone. "She turned her head away as if she didn't want to be talked to."

Miss Timmens took a long, keen look at Emma Stone. This young lady, it appeared, was rather in the habit of romancing; and the governess thought she might be doing it then.

"I vow to goodness I saw her," interrupted the girl, before Miss Timmens had got out more than half a doubting word: and her tone was truthful enough. "I'm not telling no story, 'm. I thought Nettie was crying."

"Well, it is a strange thing you should have forgotten it until this moment, Emma Stone."

"Please, 'm, it were through the pies," pleaded Emma.

It was time to depart. Bonnets and shawls were put on, and the whole of them filed out, accompanied by Miss Timmens, Mrs. Hill, and Maria Lease: good old motherly Dame Coney saying she hoped they would find the child safe in bed between the blankets,

and that her mother would have given her some kind of hot drink.

Our turn for supper came now. We took it partly standing, just the fare that the others had had, with some bread and cheese added for the Squire and old Coney. After that, we all gathered round the fire in the dining-room, those two lighting their pipes.

And I think you might almost have knocked some of us down with a feather in our surprise, when, in the midst of one of old Coney's stories, we turned round at the sudden opening of the door, and saw Miss Timmens amongst us. A prevision of evil seemed to seize Mrs. Todhetley, and she rose up.

"The child! Is she not at home?"

"No, ma'am; neither has she been there," answered Miss Timmens, ignoring ceremony (as people are apt to do at seasons of anxiety or commotion) and sitting down uninvited. "I came back to tell you so, and to ask what you thought had better be done."

"The child must have started for home and lost her way in the snow," cried the Squire, putting down his pipe in consternation. "What does the mother think?"

"I did not tell her of it," said Miss Timmens. "I went on by myself to her house; and the first thing I saw there, on opening the door, was a little pair of slippers warming on the fender. 'Oh, have you brought Nettie?' began the mother, before I could

speak: 'I've got her shoes warm for her. Is she very, very cold?—and has she enjoyed herself and been good?' Well, sir, seeing how it was—that the child had not got home—I answered lightly: 'Oh, the children are not here yet; my sister and Maria Lease are with them. I've just stepped on to see how your bruises are getting on.' For that poor Sarah Trewin is good for so little that one does not care to alarm her," concluded Miss Timmens, as if she would apologise for her deceit.

The Squire nodded approval, and told me to give Miss Timmens something hot to drink. Mrs. Todhetley, looking three parts scared out of her wits, asked what was to be done.

Yes; what was to be done? What could be done? A kind of council was held amid them, some saying one thing, some another. It seemed impossible to suggest anything.

"Had harm come to her in running home, had she fallen into the snow, for instance, or anything of that sort, we should have seen or heard her," observed Miss Timmens. "She would be sure to take the straight, direct path—the way we came here and returned."

"It might be easy enough for the child to lose her way—the roads and fields are like a wide white plain," observed Mrs. Coney. "She might have strayed aside among the trees in the triangle."

Miss Timmens shook her head in dissent.

"She'd not do that, ma'am. Since Daniel Ferrar was found there, the children don't like the three-cornered grove."

"Look here," said old Coney, suddenly speaking up. "Let us search all these places, and any others that she could have strayed to, right or left, on her road home."

He rose up, and we rose with him. It was the best thing that could be done: and no end of a relief, besides, to pitch upon something to do. The Squire ordered Mackintosh (who had not recovered himself yet) to bring a lantern, and we all put on our great coats and went forth, leaving the Mater and Mrs. Coney to keep the fire warm. A black party we looked, in the white snow, Miss Timmens making one of us.

"I can't rest," she whispered to me. "If the child has been lying on the snow all this while, we shall find her dead."

It was a still, cold, lovely night; the moon high in the sky, the snow lying white and pure beneath her beams. Tom Coney and Tod, all their better feelings and their fears aroused, plunged on fiercely, now amid the deep snow by the hedges, now on the more level path. The grove, which had been so fatal to poor Daniel Ferrar, was examined first. And now we saw the use of the lantern ordered by the Squire, at which order we had laughed surreptitiously: for it served to

light up the darker parts where the trunks of the trees grew thick. Mackintosh, who hated that grove, did not particularly relish his task of searching it, though he was in good company. But it did not appear to contain Nettie.

"She would not turn in here," repeated Miss Timmens, from the depth of her strong conviction; "I'm sure she'd not. She would rather bear onwards towards her mother's."

Bounding here, trudging there, calling her name softly, shouting loudly, we continued our search after Nettie Trewin. It was past twelve when we got back home and met Mrs. Todhetley and Mrs. Coney at the door, both standing there in their uneasiness, enveloped in woollen shawls.

"No. No success. Can't find her anywhere."

Down sank the Squire on one of the hall chairs as he spoke, as though he could not hold himself up a minute longer but was dead beat with tramping and disappointment. Perhaps he was. What was to be done next? What *could* be done? We stood round the dining-room fire, looking at one another like so many helpless mummies.

"Well," said the Pater, "the first thing is to have a drop of something hot. I am half-frozen.—What time's that?"—as the clock over the mantel-piece chimed one stroke. "Half-past twelve."

"And she's dead by this time," gasped Miss

Timmens, in a faint voice, its sharpness gone clean out of it. "I'm thinking of the poor widowed mother."

Mrs. Coney (often an invalid) said she could do no good by staying longer, and wanted to be in bed. Old Coney said *he* was not going in yet; so Tom took her over. It might have been ten minutes after this—but I was not taking any particular account of the time—that I saw Tom Coney put his head in at the parlour-door, and beckon Tod out. I went also.

"Look here," said Coney to us. "After I left mother indoors, I thought I'd search a bit about the back ground here: and I fancy I can see the marks of a child's footsteps in the snow."

"No!" cried Tod, bursting out at the back door and crossing the premises to the field.

Yes, it was so. Just for a little way along the path leading to Crabb Ravine the snow was much trodden and scattered by the large footsteps of a man, both to and fro. Presently some little footsteps, evidently of a child, seemed to diverge from this path and go onwards in rather a slanting direction through the deeper snow, as if their owner had lost the direct way. When we had tracked these steps half way across the field, Tod brought himself to a halt.

"I'm sure they are Nettie's," he said. "They look like hers. Whose else should they be? She may have fallen down the Ravine. One of you had better go

back and bring a blanket—and tell them to get hot water ready."

Eager to be of use, Tom Coney and I ran back together. Tod continued his tracking. Presently the little steps diverged towards the path, as if they had suddenly discovered their wanderings from it; and then they seemed to be lost in those other and larger footsteps which had kept steadily to the path.

"I wonder," thought Tod, halting as he lost the clue, "whether Mackintosh's big ghost could have been this poor little white-robed child? What an idiotic coward the fellow is! These are his footmarks. A slashing pace he must have travelled at, to fling the snow up in this manner!"

At that moment, as Tod stood facing the Ravine, a light, looking like the flame of a candle, small and clear and bright as that of a glow-worm, appeared on the opposite bank, and seemed to dodge about the snow-clad brushwood around the trunks of the wintry trees. What was this light?—whence did it proceed?—what caused it? It seemed we were never tired of putting these useless questions to ourselves. Tod did not know; never had known. He thought of Mack's fright and of the ghost, as he stood watching it, now disappearing in some particular spot, now coming again at ever so many yards' distance. But ghosts had no charms for Tod: by which I mean no alarms: and he

went forward again, trying to find another trace of the little footsteps.

"I don't see what should bring Nettie out here, though," ran his thoughts. "*Hope* she has not pitched head foremost down the Ravine! Confound the pol-troon!—kicking up the snow like this!"

But now, in another minute, there were traces again. The little feet seemed to have sprung aside at a tangent, and once more sought the deep snow. From that point he did not again lose them; they carried him in a slanting direction to the low and narrow dell (not much better than a ditch) which just there skirted the bordering hedge of the Ravine.

At first Tod could see nothing. Nothing but the drifted snow. But—looking closely—what was that, almost at his feet? Was it only a dent in the snow? —or was anything lying in it? Tod knelt down on the deep soft white carpet (sinking nearly up to his waist) and peered and felt.

There she was: Nettie Trewin! With her flaxen curls fallen about her head and mingling with the snow, and her little arms and neck exposed, and her pretty white frock all wet, she lay there in the deep hole. Tod, his breast heaving with all manner of emotion, gathered her into his arms, as gently as a sick infant is hushed to rest by its mother. The white face had no life in it; the heart seemed to have stop-ped beating.

"Wake up, you poor little mite!" he cried, pressing her against his warm side. "Wake up, little one! Wake up, my little frozen snow-bird!"

But there came no response to him. The child lay still and white in his arms.

"Hope she's not frozen to death!" he murmured, a queer sensation taking him. "Nettie, don't you hear me?—My goodness, what's to be done?"

He set off across the field with the child, meeting me almost directly. I ran straight up to him.

"Get out, Johnny Ludlow!" he cried roughly, in his haste and fears. "Don't stop me! Oh, a blanket, is it? That's good. Fold it round her, lad."

"Is she dead?"

"I'll be shot if I know."

He went along swiftly, holding her to him in the blanket. And a fine commotion they all made when he got her indoors.

The silly little thing, unable to get over her shyness, had taken the opportunity, when the back door was open, to steal out of it, with the view of running home to her mother. Confused, perhaps, by the bare white plain; or it may be by her own obscured intellect, so drowned in timidity; or probably confounding the back door and its approaches with the front, by which she had entered, she went straight across the field, unconscious that this was taking her in just the opposite direction to her home. It was she whom Luke

Mackintosh had met—the great idiot!—and he frightened her with his rough appearance and the bellow of fear he gave, just as much as she had frightened him. Onwards she went, blindly terrified, was stopped by the hedge, fell into the ditch, and lay buried in the snow. Whether she could be brought to life, or whether death had really taken her, was a momentous question.

I went off for Cole, flying all the way. He sent me back again, saying he'd be there as soon as I—and that Nettie Trewin must be a born simpleton.

"Master Johnny!—Mr. Ludlow!—Is it you?"

The words greeted me in a weak panting voice, just as I reachd the corner by the store barn, and I recognised Mrs. Trewin. Alarmed at Nettie's prolonged stay, she had come out, all bruised as she was, and extorted the fact—that the child was missing—from Maria Lease. I told her that the child was found—and where.

"Dead or alive, sir?"

I stammered in my answer. Cole would be up directly, I said, and we must hope for the best. But she drew a worse conclusion.

"It was all I had," she murmured. "My one little ewe lamb."

"Don't sob, Mrs. Trewin. It may turn out to be all right, you know."

"If I could but have laid her poor little face on

my bosom to die, and said good-bye to her!" she cried, the tears trickling down. "I have had so much trouble in the world, Master Johnny!—and she was all of comfort left to me in it."

We went in. Cole came rushing like a whirlwind. By-and-by they got some warmth into the child, lying so still on the bed; and she was saved.

"Were you cold, dear, in the snow?—were you frightened?" gently asked the mother, when Nettie could answer questions.

"I was very cold and frightened till I heard the angels' music, mother."

"The angels' music?"

"Yes. I knew they played it for me. After that, I felt happy and went to sleep. Oh, mother, there's nothing so sweet as angels' music."

The "Music" had been that of the church bells, wafted over the Ravine by the rarefied air; the sweet bells of Timberdale, ringing in the New Year.

THE END.

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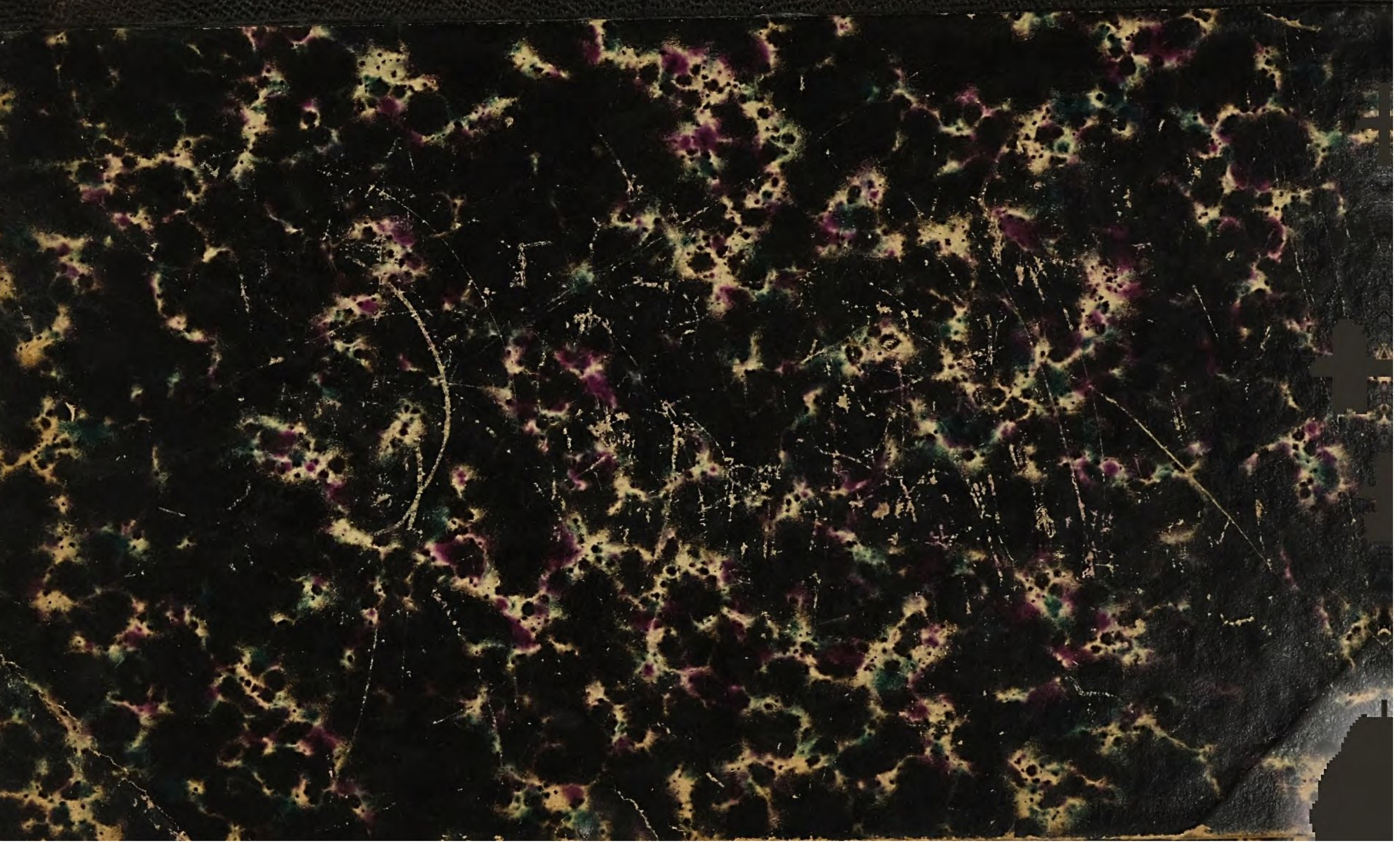

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